

CHRISTIAN COURIER

A Reformed Weekly

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53rd Year

CHRISTIAN COURIER
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OCT 20 1997

October 17, 1997

No. 2549 \$1.07

Alberta's economic worldview challenged

John Pater

EDMONTON — "It's a small window of opportunity to get the government to adjust," said Rev. Bruce Miller, a minister of a United Church in Edmonton. Miller was speaking to 200 people who had gathered on Sept. 18 and 19 in Edmonton to rethink and re-evaluate the government's single-minded focus on economic growth as the answer to society's ills.

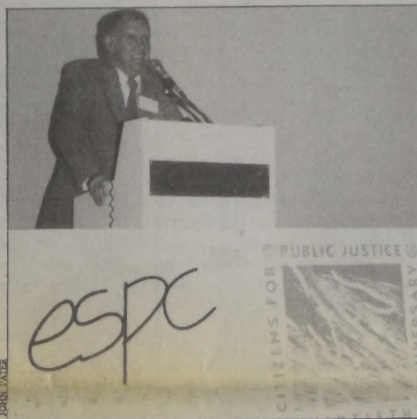
The conference had been planned by Citizens for Public Justice and the Edmonton Social Planning Council as a pre-emptive strike aimed at a Klein government sponsored "Growth Summit" to be held 10 days later.

Miller echoed the discussions of the CPJ members and the many others gathered when he said that he had a problem with the word "growth" and was "looking for a different understanding of what our priorities should be."

A broader vision

The conference was called: "Beyond Economic Growth: Building Healthy Alberta Communities." In 16 workshops and two keynote addresses the message was pounded out repeatedly: "We are not economic machines"; "Growth should not be the bottom line"; "There is more to life than economics."

Those were all pleas directed at the Klein government and at a provincial economy that has been called "heated up" and "booming." The last four years of drastic cuts in government spending and a healthy economy fed by high oil prices has resulted in



Keynote speaker Robert Theobald

billion dollar surplus budgets the last two years. What conference delegates were asking for was some balance and a broader vision.

"Growth is natural," said long time CPJ member Clarence Visser. "You want your children to grow, but not to keep on growing." Visser then made a medical analogy which drove his point home. "When growth gets out of control it's called cancer." The same goes for business and economics. "When they grow too much" He didn't need to finish to make his thought clear.

It comes down to your worldview, said keynote speaker Robert Theobald. Theobald is an

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Yukon to Yellowstone wildlife corridor debated

Alan Doerksen

EDMONTON — Conservationists concerned with the future of grizzly bears and wolves in the Rockies are working to create a huge wildlife corridor which would run from the Yukon to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Although many biologists are enthused about the idea, there are opponents.

In early October, more than 300 experts in biology met at a conference in Waterton, Alta., to discuss the concept known as "Y2Y" (Yukon to Yellowstone). Biologists and conservationists first started debating the idea four years ago.

Habitat needed

The plan would accommodate large carnivores such as grizzlies and wolves, which need a very large amount of land to roam to find food and mates — much more than can be provided by national parks. For example, one wolf was recently given a radio collar and tracked from northern Montana through the Rockies to the northern border of B.C.



Animals know no boundaries in the Rocky Mountains

Although there are parks between the Yukon and Yellowstone that offer protection to animals (such as Nahanni National Park in the north, Waterton, Banff and Jasper parks farther south), there are also vast areas between these parks that offer no such protection. These parks therefore create isolated populations of bears and wolves

that are unconnected to each other, a situation which could eventually lead to their extinction.

"It's been demonstrated that islands that are genetically isolated from other populations have species go extinct on them," says Harvey Locke, a founder of the Y2Y conservation initiative. Locke is concerned

that there has been an increase of logging and mining recently in the Rockies. For instance, in early October, the Cheviot open pit coal mine opened at the edge of Jasper National Park.

Paul Paquet, a University of Calgary biologist who also attended the Y2Y conference in Waterton, says human intrusion into the habitat of large animals is the biggest threat to bears and wolves, according to an *Edmonton Journal* report. "People are the problem and that's why we have to do this co-operatively, because you have to find a way for people to live on the same landscape as wolves and bears," he says.

Paquet predicts the Cheviot mine will have adverse effects on bears but will not have much of an effect on wolves. "I'm very much an advocate for wildlife, but that is the objective

answer I arrived at after doing the analysis," says Paquet, who conducted a study of the Cheviot mine area recently.

Bridges for animals

The Y2Y effort has already met with some public and government support. For instance, B.C. Premier Glen Clark is considering setting aside vast tracts of land in northeastern B.C. which would offer greater protection for animals.

Y2Y has achieved some concrete results, such as a series of animal bridges that have been built over the main highway near Banff in order to connect animal populations cut off from each other by major roads. Locke says such bridges are a better idea than underpasses built below highways, which he says "don't work for grizzly

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News

People more important than profits, speakers emphasize

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economist based in New Orleans who has written books on the need for fundamental change in our mindsets and ways of life.

"The way you look at the universe determines what your priorities are," he said. Do we want a world that works and healthy relationships with other human beings, or do we want maximum economic growth? The one worldview is relationship-oriented Theobald said; the other is one of measurement.

Money as servant

"It's a different bottom line than is assumed," said Gerald Vandezande, public affairs director of CPJ. And it's a bottom line that ought to be followed by the corporate world as much as by governments. Vandezande led a conference workshop on corporate citizenship.

"Profiteering banks and oil companies," said Vandezande, "have an obligation to contribute to the common good."

Their bottom line is not just financial return on investment, but how that return impacts on the environment, their employees and the community and nation in which they operate. "Money," he said, "should be seen as a servant of the people. You cannot separate economic activity from the people who take part. If you don't integrate, you get compartmentalized views of life."

Vandezande then challenged governments to recover their "constitutional and political right to hold corporations publicly accountable for their actions."

Good economic sense

At the end of the two days several themes emerged which conference delegates agreed needed to be presented to the Alberta government at the Growth Summit. Key among them was that good social and environmental programs make good economic sense, and that it was



Harry Kits (r.), Executive Director of CPJ, has a discussion with Kevin Taft at the Edmonton conference.

up to governments to take an active, creative role in contributing to the quality of life of Albertans.

Tied to that was an agreement that government must reinvest in

people through strong social programs and services which support health and well-being in its varied forms. It was also agreed that in a province as wealthy as Alberta it is not

acceptable that so many individuals and families must barely survive on low incomes.

The recommendations were passed on to several people who would be attending the government's Growth Summit. That summit took place September 29 and 30 in Edmonton and saw people from the business and corporate sector bang heads with people from municipalities, schools, hospitals and social service agencies.

Premier Klein as well as many business leaders who attended the summit, are being quoted as saying that they have been convinced that good social systems and "people development" should be the government's main priorities in the future.

And so people like Bruce Miller, Gerald Vandezande and the other delegates to the Beyond Economic Growth conference appear to have made a small dent into the dominant thinking about economics.

How Premier Klein's 'Growth Summit' grew

Jake Kuiken

When I was asked by former Alberta Liberal MLA Bettie Hewes to be a delegate to Premier Ralph Klein's "Growth Summit '97" I had no idea what would be involved, but I said Yes without hesitation. It interested me, and as president of the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers (AARSW) it would provide me a chance to advance some of "our" issues.

Nearly 100 Albertans from energy, business, agriculture, government, MASH (municipalities, academics, schools and hospitals) and social fields were to meet for two days at the end of September. Brought on by a surplus of provincial government revenues, we delegates were to prepare the government's agenda up to the year 2005.

Diverse group

Although I had read Jack Quarter's book *Canada's Social Economy* some years ago, the term "social economy" is not a part of Albertan's every-day vocabulary, it having originated in France. Premier Klein's executive assistant Rod Love liked the term, however, and added a "social economy sector" to the growth summit. I was part of it.

Our sector was very eclectic: a former Liberal politician, an



Ralph Klein

environmentalist, a United Church minister who studied at the Free University of Amsterdam and knows the neo-Kuyperian tradition, a performing artist, an energy industry executive, two non-profit CEOs, a consumer advocate, an advocate for persons with disabilities, a recycling expert, two university students and a social worker.

For such a diverse group to try to form a cohesive public policy approach turned out to be both challenging and rewarding. In the end, just before the actual summit, our group formed a document which brought

together a vision, principles and nearly 100 (!) recommendations for action.

Spontaneous discussions

The serious pre-summit work began in July. Along with a two-foot stack of reading materials there were "mini-summits," almost weekly meetings, and telephone conversations with people who wanted their views heard. Three people, especially, helped reinforce and formulate my own thinking: John Hiemstra and Elwil Beukes from the King's University College, and Rod Adachi, executive director of the AARSW.

Over the summer, 35 mini-summits came about spontaneously through Albertans who wanted to contribute to the Growth Summit, the majority of them put together by groups such as the United Way of Calgary and the Edmonton Social Planning Council/Citizens for Public Justice (see front page story).

Toward the centre

During the Growth Summit itself the various "sectors" were mixed into cross-sectoral groups, breaking the comfort of familiarity. I spent two days dealing with issues such as tax cuts, transportation and hi-tech infrastructure, and industrial/

business policy with the president of an international energy company, a health care expert, an environmental think-tank executive, the mayor of Calgary, the president of the Alberta Chamber of Commerce and the president of the Alberta Teachers Association.

After those two days the Chamber of Commerce representative summed it up nicely: "I never knew this stuff was so complicated."

His favorite policy — tax cuts — hadn't survived the combined onslaught of a teacher, social worker and mayor. And transportation systems barely made it to third place. Everyone realized that greed-based individualism had to go. In fact, that's what the Growth Summit was all about.

Clever populist

Ralph Klein is a populist, and a very clever one. He realizes just how badly the policy agenda in Alberta has been skewed to the right by would-be "reformers." To move his own caucus toward the centre of the political spectrum he developed the summit idea — in conjunction with two ex-Liberal MLAs, an economist and a social justice advocate to make that move more palatable to Albertans.

Let me put it all in perspec-

tive. The Saturday morning before the summit I went to see Lillian for a haircut; she's been cutting my hair since the mid-'70s. During our conversation I asked her what she thought about the Growth Summit. "What Growth Summit?" she asked.

She's a single mother with four kids, and works part time. She's "poor," however you define it. She doesn't read the newspaper or watch much TV.

Kids first

After I explained she said, "Jake, you tell me what you think." I persisted, wanting to know what she thought was important. Finally she said, "Well, I'm a mother. I think a lot about my kids' future. I think their education and health are the most important things for you guys to talk about."

That was it! Nothing very complicated. In two days our collective wisdom led us to choose the following priorities: 1. People development (read: children and education); 2. Health and quality of life (read: health care). True, there were six or seven other issues, but they didn't matter as much after what Lillian told me.

Jake Kuiken is a social worker who lives and works in Calgary.

News

National park system criticized

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bears and wolves."

John Wood, professor of environmental science at The King's University College in Edmonton and a regular CC columnist, endorses the Y2Y plan. "The Y2Y project is trying to address the problem of habitat fragmentation," he explains. "The focus goes well beyond individual species to entire biological communities. When these communities become isolated by human activities, it is similar to being on an island."

"Species require space," he asserts. "They simply have to have it."

Wood sees the national park system in Canada and the U.S. as "a patchwork — habitat islands with very few connections between them... in a sea of human activity." Most environmentalists would like to see about 10 per cent of Canada's land designated as protected areas for animals, he says.

Wood says, however, that the Y2Y plan also "has to work for people as well as animals." Landowners, as well as animals, need to be protected, he says.

But Wood notes that the Bible warns against over-development of natural areas. Isaiah 5:8 reads: "Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land."

Too many flags

He doesn't see the plan as creating one continuous park from Yellowstone to the Yukon. Rather, he sees it as providing protected areas for animals and putting in place structures such as animal bridges over highways.

Roadkill is a serious problem in national parks like Jasper, says Wood, who recently bicycled from Jasper to Banff. On that trip, Wood did not see any large live animals, which concerns him.

Recently in Jasper, park workers put up flags for every animal kill that had taken place there. "There were hundreds of flags. It was terrible," he says. Often people will see one dead animal beside a road, but the flags put the seriousness of the problem into perspective.

Wood likes the idea of animal bridges. "The concept appears sound," he says. "Some species will go through underpasses but others won't."

Jim Abbott, MP for Kootenay-Columbia, B.C., says he is "really aggressively opposed" to the Y2Y plan. Abbott is the Reform



Reform MP Jim Abbott

Party's Canadian heritage critic (which covers national parks), and is a longtime resident of Cranbrook, B.C., which is part of the proposed Y2Y area and not far from Waterton Lakes National Park.

Abbott sees the Y2Y plan as "a growing threat.... The people who are pushing this have an academic interest or extreme environmental leaning, or are people who have never lived in the area, taking a Bambi approach to the issue."

Abbott sees the plan as being pro-animal but anti-people: "Four legs good, two legs bad — that is the bottom line." Y2Y's initiators "will never admit that their objective is to create a massive corridor with no people," but that is their ultimate goal, Abbott claims.

If this happens, he expects there to be major forest fires in the area. Abbott points to the time 100 years ago when three serious forest fires raged through the Rockies from Colorado to the Yukon.

Although most environmentalists now see Yellowstone Park as a model of good conservation, Abbott describes it as "an abject disaster." For many years, park authorities suppressed forest fires in the park, which "ended up loading the park with fuel. When there were a number of lightning strikes, it was a disaster. [Fire] permanently damages massive areas of the park."

Positive human intervention

Abbott insists that clear-cut logging can actually improve conditions for animals such as grizzlies. One area close to Cranbrook has been logged extensively and now has "tremendous forage for grizzlies," he says. That area now has many grizzlies and deer.

"I am not suggesting we start clear-cutting in national parks," he cautions. But he points out that this is one example of how human intervention can bring good results for some animals.

Abbott also tells of an open-pit mining site that started up more than 20 years ago near his home in Cranbrook. Over the years, developers carved away at a mountainside, removing minerals. Now the mining has finished and the area has been restored to what he calls "a superior nature." Animals such as wild sheep have returned to the area, he says.

Reform misunderstands

But Tom Marr-Laing, executive director of the Pembina Institute in Drayton Valley, Alta., says Abbott is "misunderstanding what's being proposed here." In Marr-Laing's opinion, the Y2Y plan would not involve removing all people from the Rockies corridor and does not mean there will be no forestry work in the area. He does not see a serious threat of forest fires in the area.

Marr-Laing also questions Abbott's claims that clearcutting creates a good environment for grizzlies. "It allows some growth of smaller types of grass they feed on," he says, "but it's somewhat problematic," because bears need tree protection. Open areas make them an easy target for hunters.

Marr-Laing asserts that open-pit mining also poses a threat to grizzlies. "The Cheviot mine area has a high level of grizzly activity," he says. The mine will be "cutting across areas they're used to passing through.... This will have a negative impact on grizzlies."

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Editorial

Talk about the foolishness of Promise Keepers!

It was good to see a recent issue of the *Globe and Mail* carry a front-page news story on the Oct. 4 "Stand in the Gap" Promise Keepers rally in Washington, D.C., that was both balanced and informative. It was all the more remarkable because so many other news media slanted their coverage by focusing on the fact that Promise Keepers makes a lot of money, is exclusively male, mostly white and urges men to assume leadership in the family, all of which is the truth, but not the whole truth.

Reporters seemed uncomfortable with the fact that these men were wearing their emotions and religion on their sleeves. In the Netherlands, a one-minute spot on television left the impression that such emotional nonsense could take place "only in America," one viewer reported.

The next day's issue of the *Globe and Mail* featured an editorial on this men's movement that was downright positive. Entitled "Is It Wrong to Keep a Promise?" the editorial

talked about Promise Keepers as "a search to define a role for once-dominant men and husbands in a world of gender equality, anti-macho values and broken marriages."

In a humorous aside, the editors said that Promise Keepers committed "the worst possible transgression of the late 20th century: They didn't invite women to join their club. And in feminism, more so than in Christianity, to omit is to sin." The wives and girlfriends didn't mind, said the editors, because they liked the idea that their men were dealing with questions of responsibility. Women who didn't know these men, like the bare-breasted Lesbian Avengers and the feminist National Organization for Women apparently did mind. They saw the rally as a nail in the coffin of ultra-feminist politics.

In closing, the editorial saw this men-only revival which focuses on personal responsibility "as an important social change whose consequences could well be for the good."

Anyone for ripped suits?

We think that the phenomenon of both this and the secular men's movement is an acknowledgement on the part of men that there is something very wrong with the male culture — with the way boys enter adulthood and the way men practise it. The North American male consciousness is plagued with distortions such as workaholicism, pornography, sexual innuendos in the work place, infidelity, too much focus on sports and status symbols, love of money and a neglectful or sometimes abusive treatment of family and spouse.

If a bunch of men want to come together to confess those sins and weaknesses, why should anyone mind? Why should people be uncomfortable with the sight of thousands of men crying? They should have been there in Old Testament times when men (and women) would publicly tear their clothes and cover themselves in ashes! The severity of human (or male) problems and sins warrants the most dramatic signs of repentance, assuming they are genuine. Having a lot of men come together to confess their sins is a darn sight better than having them gather for stag parties or strip teasers.

Perhaps the time has come for radical feminists and journalists to come together and confess *their* sins.

A boring refrain

What the generally negative coverage of the Promise Keepers movement demonstrates is that the lies of a godless society are becoming more transparent. There is very little truth out there, especially when one enters the arena of public power and communication. "I no longer

see the media as friends but as enemies full of lies and incessant propaganda," a reader pronounced in a letter to the editor of the *Globe*.

The reader complained about the way the secular press treats the Catholic Church. "The various media love to promote the so-called 'alternative lifestyles' as models of the diversity of Canadian society," he writes. "But these are nothing more than tired variations on a vapid theme." What that vapid theme is the reader did not explain, but one surmises that it has to do with everything but the Christian sink, or, in his case, the Catholic Church.

How near is the Word?

What the Promise Keepers movement is also telling us is that the church has failed to ring the alarm bell on whatever it is that misguides and misshapes men. Why can these confessions of infidelity and workaholicism not take place in local congregations? Why do men have to drive or fly hundreds of miles to find out that they should be responsible spouses and fathers? Is the Word not near us, in our mouths and in our hearts?

Are we that steeped in the secular culture that we do not know how to nurture sensitive and sensible boys? Is it true that Christian men do not know about the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? How can anyone be a workaholic and experience joy? How can anyone be unfaithful and practise self-control? How can anyone neglect children and love kindness, especially when the word "kindness" has to do with kin-ness?

Could it be that the ghost of male dominance and male macho-ism is preventing men in the church from facing up to their own weaknesses and culturally conditioned flaws? Come to think of it, if it is true that men are generally skewed in their development, women must be too. If life is like a dance, one partner's wrong steps affects the steps of the other. For starters, why are women being the kind of moms that make football players say "Hi Mom" on television and not, "Hi Dad"? Doesn't that reveal a kind of co-dependency between adult son and overly protective Mom? Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen points out in *Gender and Grace* that one result of the Fall is that women tend to focus too singlemindedly on relationships.

One thing we must not forget is that at bottom we are dealing with a human problem, not a men's problem. Promise Keepers as a men's movement is a sign of things gone wrong. When it comes to confession of sin and falling short of the glory of God, no gender lords it over the other. Women are not less sinful than men; only less misguided. **BW**

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Formerly known as Calvinist Contact
Founded in 1945

- An independent weekly that seeks to:*
- ◆ report on significant events in the Christian community and the world;
 - ◆ express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a Reformed perspective;
 - ◆ provide contact for the Christian community.

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Associate Editor: Marian Van Til Staff Reporter and Layout:
Alan Doerksen Circulation Manager and
Proofreading: Grace Bowman
Advertising, Typesetting and Layout: Ingrid Torn

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4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON, L2W 1A1

Tel: (905) 682-8311;

Fax: (905) 682-8313;

E-mail: cceditor@aol.com

Letters

Don't abolish the most Calvinistic instrument of discipline

CC has carried several pieces about the physical discipline of children for our enlightenment. I'd like to add some musings from the viewpoint of the child. Admittedly, I haven't been a child for quite some time now; in fact, I am now at the stage where I am a parent to my parents. Still, as the pop psych dispensers like to tell us, there's a child somewhere within each of us still tweaking the adult. From the perspective of that child, I say abolishing corporal punishment is an impoverishment of experience. Some of my fondest recollections are of my mother's *matteklopper* (rugbeater).

When we immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands, my parents must have

anticipated the need for strict discipline to prevent their children from going native on the Alberta frontier. Packed prominently in our *kist* (shipping crate) was a whole bushel of *mattekloppers*. They were works of art. They were constructed of bamboo, with a sturdy, braided handle, and a striking surface shaped like a cloverleaf. It made a musical swish through the air when you brandished it.

Strong shoulders

Neat Dutch housewives would periodically drag all their area rugs (no one had wall-to-wall carpet in those days) outside, drape them over the fence or

clothesline and awaken memories of dirty thirties duststorms in the neighborhood. This explains why so many Dutch housewives used to be blessed with powerful shoulders and an iron grip.

Nevertheless, the first, most important, and most frequent use of the *matteklopper* was for discipline. The *matteklopper* is associated in my mind with the primary use of the law, the one most valued in Calvinism. I am convinced that Dutch Calvinism would have been nothing without the *matteklopper*. Its virtues are deeply imprinted in the flesh and bones of many generations of Dutch Calvinists. This awesome institution and symbol is now threatened with extinction. Future generations of Calvinist children will be the poorer for it.

The memory of coming home from school (four hours late, with no hint of where I was) to be welcomed by my eager mother, brandishing her *matteklopper* will be with me always. It was an institution with numerous beneficial spin-offs, not all of them intended, of course. A kid developed great dodging skills and lightening reflexes.

Training in strategy

Strategy was also important. In my case, for example, I knew that everything depended on getting past my mother into the living room and from there into my parents' bedroom. To do this was very tricky, for my mother was always positioned between the entrance and the living room door. The trick was to get on the other side of the kitchen table and get her chasing you around it. At some point, I'd shoot off at a tangent to the circle and make it through the living room door and from there into the bedroom. If you had a sufficient lead, you could dive under the large parental bed before mother could

score any hits.

This was by no means the end of the chase, of course. The *matteklopper* had a long handle and reached far under the bed. And Dutch mothers don't give up so easily. In a matter of moments the *matteklopper* would come swishing underneath the bed to make its music.

But I had prepared for this moment. Against the far wall I kept a cardboard box. It demanded some of the skills of a contortionist to get the box positioned in time, but in those days children got plenty of practice. That big cardboard box taught me a great deal about the concept of the substitutionary atonement, a doctrine that has fallen upon unresponsive hearts nowadays, for obvious reasons.

Each time the *matteklopper* made a resounding thump on the box, I squealed in pain. I was a proficient actor, so it took only a few thumps and squalls before compassion triumphed over anger.

"I know it hurts," she would announce, puffing with exertion and passion, "but next time you'll think twice before getting home so late!"

It was always difficult to make penitent overtures from beneath the bed. The fact that the box had received all the discipline used to fill me with such hilarity, a hilarity that had to be stifled at all costs, that I could hardly speak. My mother, I'm sure, took the gasps for sobs. And she probably suffered greatly at the violence of her anger.

It had all the characteristics of high drama, and with it came a great catharsis, as Aristotle taught us. Have we really thought through the implications of abolishing a tradition with so many and such varied virtues?

Harry der Nederlanden
St. Catharines, Ont.

Open letter

How would you do public justice to gays?

Our country is in the midst of rethinking and reshaping public policy towards gay and lesbian couples. B.C. is reviewing all its laws after two bills provided rights to homosexual couples. The Ontario government is conducting an internal review of its policies as is the federal government. In the midst of these changes Citizens for Public Justice, and in particular Gerald Vandezande, have been asked by politicians and religious groups to set forth their recommendations. To encourage more discussion among Christians, Vandezande is asking readers of Christian Courier and other Christian publications to respond to a few questions he raises.

Editor

Some Christians and churches have asked questions about Citizens for Public Justice and its understanding of biblical justice as it applies to the equality rights of gay and lesbian couples and their legal claims to fiscal and economic benefits.

As an independent, non-partisan Christian political organization, CPJ is engaged in ongoing research and public advocacy that focus on our government's public justice responsibilities. CPJ concentrates on the need for public policy proposals that consistently promote the practice of equal justice for all citizens and all institutions, be they Christian or committed to a different faith or ideology.

For example, CPJ advocates freedom of religion, parental choice and fiscal equity for all faiths and all values communities active in education. This advocacy includes equitable treatment for Christians, Jewish, Islamic, Sikh as well as "Secular" schools. We believe this inclusive view of justice to be in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures, Jesus and the prophets.

CPJ distinguishes between a government's public policy duties and a church's ecclesiastical responsibilities. Each institution has its own calling and particular task. No societal institution should lord it over others. Government should act justly as it relates to all citizens and institutions, also when recognizing the human rights and responsibilities of neighbors whose sexual orientation differs from most people's.

What do you as a Christian think of CPJ's public approach to citizenship rights and responsibilities (whether that concerns the public, legal recognition and government funding of religiously diverse schools or the provision of public, legal protection and socio-economic benefits to gay and lesbian couples)?

Would you also share with us your response to these questions:

1. What can Christian citizens be proposing to our governments so that they will practise public justice for all?
2. How can our governments best ensure the full protection of the fundamental freedoms and equality rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?
3. What can churches urge our governments to be and do to promote public justice without imposing the church's confessional stance on others?

We look forward to receiving your open-hearted replies either in CC or by writing to us. You may also ask for CPJ's discussion paper "Legal Equality — a Public Justice Response to Discrimination Against Gays and Lesbians," available for \$4 by writing CPJ, 229 College St. #311, Toronto, Ont., M5T 1R4

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.

Canada mail: Publications Mail Registration No. 0451. Postage paid at St. Catharines, Ont. Postmaster: send address changes to Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, Ont. L2W 1A1.

U.S. mail: Christian Courier (USPS 518-090). Second-class postage paid at Lewiston, NY. Postmaster: send address changes to Christian Courier, Box 110, Lewiston, NY 14092.

Subscriptions:	Canada	U.S.A.
(effective Feb. 1, 1995)	(GST incl.)	(GST free)
one year (44 issues)	\$43.50	\$35.00 U.S.
two years (88 issues)	\$82.00	\$66.00 U.S.
three years (132 issues)	\$123.00	\$99.00 U.S.
overseas one year	\$135 airmail	
	\$85.00 surface mail	

Advertising deadlines: display advertising: Wednesday, 8:30 a.m.; classified advertising: Thursday, 8:30 a.m. All deadlines are for the following week's issue. See classified pages for more details. Advertising rate sheets available. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published weekly on Fridays except for Feb. 28, April 4, May 30, July 11, Aug. 15, Oct. 3, Nov. 28, and Dec. 26.

All correspondence should be addressed to: 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, Ont. L2W 1A1, Tel.: 905-682-8311 or fax: 905-682-8313

PRINTED IN CANADA

This tabloid contains recycled paper.



Arts/Family

Calvin art prof's photos 'interpret Mary'



Marian Van Til

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Backyard statues of the Virgin Mary are not something that most Reformed people know much about or are even interested in. But that's not the case for Calvin College art professor Jennifer Steensma.

Steensma teaches photography at Calvin and, that being the case, is herself an excellent photographer. As a child growing up in Rochester, New York, she would notice Madonna shrines in the yards of some of her neighbors. She was fascinated and wondered, "Why can't we have these?" Steensma's family were members of the Christian Reformed Church in East Palmyra, New York.

Later, she would realize that Catholic churches contained a plethora of color and statuary, so unlike the interiors of the Reformed churches she knew. The contrast intrigued her.

Documenting Madonnas

As an adult she has remained interested in the very personal and peculiarly Roman Catholic expression of faith demonstrated by backyard Madonna shrines, and as an artist she is struck by how these "Madonnas" are presented as physical representations. "They have such a presence," says Steensma.

She explains, "I thought it would be a good project to go

around documenting them." She photographed shrines in western New York, western Michigan and Kentucky. "The more I photographed, the more I realized that they say a lot about people."

What exactly they "said" about their owners was harder to determine. One thing Steensma did conclude was that, at least in New York and in Michigan, backyard (or sometimes front-yard) Madonna shrines show up most often in blue-collar immigrant neighborhoods where the residents are predominantly Polish or Italian Catholics. (The Irish are much less likely to have them.)

Gender connection

Their owners also tended to be older women. Except in Kentucky, where the shrines seemed to be an important faith expression for a much broader range of Catholics. Why? Steensma wondered, but never really found out.

When Steensma would ask permission of homeowners to photograph the Madonnas, she found people quite willing to allow her to do that — and quite willing to talk about it, though Steensma didn't set out to formally interview the owners.

She found that most Madonnas were tended by women, and each shrine was "transformed by personal taste, preference."

Many of these Catholic women feel a profound "gender connection to Mary," says Steensma. Not only because she was a woman, and a mother — the Mother of God, in their parlance — but also because the Catholic Church is still very male-dominated.

From visual reminder to idolatry

Many of the women who had statues of Mary in their yards (often surrounded by a flower garden or other careful landscaping) "see it as a visual reminder that God is present, and for many, she is their co-

mediator."

Steensma continues, "They would deny they were worshipping the sculpture, but they feel connected to her." However, "to some of the owners, she may be an idol to them," Steensma says. "And many feel Mary helps watch over their children."

In fact, Steensma found that "most frequently, they are given as gifts by children [to their mothers]." The shrines "mean much more than other lawn ornaments," says Steensma. They are religious and cultural artifacts.

Steensma notes the difference between that kind of public, visual display of Catholic faith and how Reformed Christians "visualize" their faith. "We don't feel comfortable with more visuals," she says, "but it doesn't have to be idolatry. Our visual expression [of faith] doesn't come out except at the holidays, especially Christmas. But we're uncomfortable with more than that."

From Nov. 11 through Dec. 7 in Grand Rapids, 30 of Steensma's Madonna photos will appear in a Gallery Arcadia exhibit called "Interpreting Mary." The exhibit will also display the work of two other women, the fine porcelain vessels of another Calvin art professor, Anna Greidanus, and the oil still lifes of Judy Magginni.



Marian den Boer

The cat came back

One evening as guests were leaving our home, our adolescent cat, Fly, slipped out unnoticed into the rainy darkness. When it was time to lock up for the night, we couldn't find him anywhere. We looked all through the house and rang his toy bell up and down the street. He was gone. This happened just three days after we spent \$100 on having him neutered and tattooed.

The next morning he was still gone. A gloom settled over our household as we considered the possibilities. He could have been run over by a car. He could have been stolen — he was so cute with his white face and little black beard. He could have fallen in the pool. Fifteen-year-old Paul pulled back the cover to check. He wasn't there. We called the SPCA with Fly's tattoo ID number. They didn't have him.

'They wander'

Bill, our unsaved next-door neighbor, asked "What happened to your cat?"

"He got away."

"I told you, you can't let them out when they're that young...; they wander."

Mabel, Bill's unsaved wife, encouraged us with, "He could come back. They do come back."

A Christian friend told me about a cat which moved from home to home every two weeks until months and months later his owners caught up with him. Together we prayed Fly would come back and be well taken care of in the meantime.

Our family had to admit life was simpler without Fly. We no longer had to remember to close the toilet lid so he wouldn't drink out of the bowl. No more did we have to clear the kitchen table every time we left the room, for fear he would lick the butter or drink the milk. Yet we wanted our cat back. We missed having him flying around, attacking house plants and coasters.

Preparing for a catless future

As the days passed, Marty put Fly's food dish away. He emptied the brand new bigger better kitty litter box we had just bought. Angela and Amanda plastered the neighborhood with 17 posters, "Lost Black and White Cat," "Fly," Male, 7 months. Black tail and back, white face and legs." The poster gave our address and phone number and even offered a \$50 reward.

Then exactly two weeks after he had left, the doorbell rang. There stood two children and a woman with Fly in her arms, "Is this your cat?"

He had been at their house for the past several weeks. He'd stayed outside the first night, but then came in and made himself at home. While with them he'd grown several centimetres and put on more than a few grams. They'd been feeding him and asking just about everybody who's cat he was. A friend had noticed our poster.

The woman wouldn't hear of taking the reward. She was simply glad for us. We thanked her profusely as she left.

You wouldn't believe our joy. The whole family was smiling and dancing and laughing. We hugged that cat and gave him kitty treats. The cat that once was lost had been found.

Now we're praying for Bill and Mabel.

Marian den Boer lives with her husband, Marty, and five of their children in Hamilton, Ont. Since he's come back, Fly flies out the front door every chance he gets!

Arts/Media

Book Review

This surprising Christian novel illuminates the 'Dark Ages'

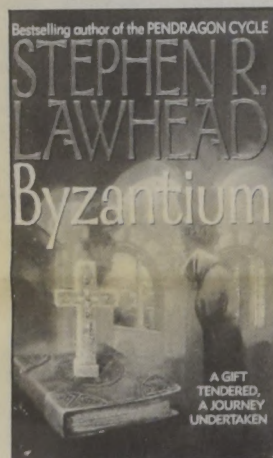
Marian Van Til

Byzantium

By Stephen R. Lawhead

New York: HarperPrism, 1997. Paperback ed. ISBN 0-06-105754-1. 870 pp. \$8.99 (Cdn), \$6.99 (US).

This absorbing novel is set in the late 9th century. Its fictional story encompasses real geography from obscure Ireland, to barbarian Scandinavia, to Constantinople (Byzantium) —



City of Gold and seat of culture — and is set against real history: the growing hostility between Christianity and Islam which preceded the Crusades, and the political intrigue that accompanied it. The protagonist is an Irish monk, Aidan mac Cainnech, who is chosen to participate in a pilgrimage to Constantinople. The pilgrims wish to present the Emperor with a rare gift from Kells, their monastery — an illuminated manuscript of Scripture passages, held in a gem-studded gold- and silver-laden cover. (Copies of what is known as the Book of Kells still exist and contain what many consider to be the finest examples we know of medieval illumination, i.e., highly colored illustrations with ornate calligraphy and

figures). That the pilgrimage has another purpose, Aidan does not learn until much, much later.

Layered plot, lots of excitement

If such a historical and religious setting seems a remote and unpromising backdrop for a novel, author Stephen Lawhead makes sure that's not the case. His meticulous historical research into the speech, clothing, culinary, religious and general cultural habits and worldview of his characters (Irish monks, Viking barbarians, Saracen princes, Byzantine tradespeople, even the Christian emperor himself) make these people absolutely real.

The story is essentially Aidan's, and is told from his point of view. Lawhead manages to convincingly create situations that put the monk in the centre of the action, whether in the peace-filled austerity of the Irish monastery, aboard a Viking ship, in the desert tent of an Arab amir or on the streets of bustling 9th century Byzantium.

The plot has plenty of layers and enough exciting situations that need resolution to keep you turning pages virtually non-stop to the end. But what is most intriguing (and satisfying) to the Christian reader is Lawhead's skill at weaving religious worldviews (Christian, but later, also Islamic) into the plot.

Lawhead's choice of setting allows him to let the monks' biblical worldview predominate and the gospel message to come through clearly. But it always comes through in context and never feels like the author has an ulterior motive, preaching instead of story telling.

As Aidan has a crisis of faith and appears to renounce his priesthood, we wonder what to make of it; the crisis is the only thing in the story that at first appears to be somewhat contrived. It makes more sense in retrospect, however, and the story's ending, while happy, is quite different than one might expect.

I highly recommend this novel for upcoming long winter evenings or to take along on a relaxing holiday.

Film star regrets not passing on faith to his sons

LOS ANGELES — Martin Sheen, the former Hollywood rebel, says watching his sons lead a life similar to his own early decadent life fills him with remorse, reports *Pro-Life E News Canada*. Sheen, whose real name is Estevez, grew up in a pious Roman Catholic family and now takes his own faith seriously.

"It's no accident that, for all his [early] wildness, Sheen belongs to the exclusive club of steadfast Hollywood husbands, married to his wife, Janet, since 1961," asserts *Pro-Life E News*

Canada.

Martin Sheen and his four sons (three actors — Charlie Sheen, Emilio Estevez, Rene Estevez — and a dancer, Ramon Estevez) have an unusual relationship. But in the mid-1980s, Sheen's sons Charlie and Emilio were furious when their father forced them to take responsibility after they made their girlfriends pregnant.

"Abortion was suggested," says Sheen. "I don't believe in abortion and neither does my wife." So Sheen offered to look after the mothers and their

children himself (model Carey Salley, who has had two children by Emilio, and Paula Profit, Charlie's high school girlfriend, who has one child by him.) Martin Sheen bought houses in Los Angeles for the two women and set up trust funds for his grandchildren, now aged 13, 11 and 10.

"I never lost my faith," says Sheen. "Now it is a bone of contention in my soul that I did not share my faith with my kids, as my parents did with me. It [has been] a source of grace when I needed it."

National Endowment for the Arts survives U.S. House elimination effort

WASHINGTON, D.C. (EP) — U.S. House and Senate negotiators voted Sept. 30 to continue funding the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at nearly the same level as the previous fiscal year, despite an early House vote to eliminate all funding for the agency.

The House-Senate Conference Committee approved a \$98 million budget for the agency, down only slightly from the \$99.5 million budget the NEA enjoyed in the just-completed fiscal year.

The committee also increased the percentage of NEA funding that goes directly to states to 40 per cent from 35 per cent, limited the amount any one state can receive to 15 per cent of the total budget, and placed six members of Congress on the NEA's governing council.

Led by conservatives who are against arts subsidies in general, and some of the controversial projects the NEA funded in par-

ticular, the House voted in July to eliminate all funding for the endowment. The 217-216 vote was a victory for representatives who criticized the agency for funding artwork which they said attacks Christian and family values and glorifies homosexuality. But the Senate defeated a similar defunding proposal 77-23 in mid-September.

Critics out to lunch

The sharp difference between House and Senate proposals set the stage for negotiation of a compromise. But on Sept. 23 congressmen who are NEA supporters pushed through a resolution instructing House negotiators to support NEA funding.

That non-binding resolution, introduced by Rep. Sid Yates (D-Ill.), caught NEA foes by surprise, and was passed by a voice vote when there were few NEA critics on the floor of the House.

'Good News' for Planet Hollywood

LONDON, England (EP) — Rambo and the Terminator will be there in spirit as Harper Collins Publishers holds a 21st birthday party for its Good News Bible at London's Planet Hollywood.

The restaurant is part of a chain founded by actors Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger. The venue was chosen as part of the society's

effort to encourage a less stuffy image for Christianity.

Jeremy Yates-Round, deputy managing director of Harper Collins, explained, "What we're saying is, 'Here's a Bible for modern times.' The film industry is part of modern culture."

Since its first publication the Good News Bible has sold over nine million copies.

Dear Lord

So far today I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, lusted, lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or over-indulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, Lord, I'm going to get out of bed. From then on I'm probably going to need a lot of help.

Amen.

Dairrel Ham



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Church

Hindu extremists condemn Mother Teresa as a 'schemer'

Christians facing increased opposition in Indian states

CALCUTTA, India (EP) — Two days before the nation of India honored Mother Teresa with a full state funeral, Hindu extremists condemned the late nun as a clever schemer who exploited the fears of the poor to proselytize for Christianity.

According to Compass Direct, the accusations were made by

the World Hindu Council, the ideological wing of India's largest political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Joint general secretary, Balakrishna Naik said, "If Jesus were to come to see what she was doing he would have approved. India has always been a tolerant society and if religion comes from a person's convictions that is all right. But using the garb of religion to appeal to a person's disability or poverty in order to increase the number of Christian

converts is a breach of human rights."

Mother Teresa was attacked by Hindu extremists during her lifetime as well. In 1995, Hindu holy woman Sadhvi Rithambara called the nun a "witch" and vowed to wipe out India's Christians. Rithambara was arrested on charges of inciting hatred.

The 87-year-old Mother Teresa, who had labored among Calcutta's poor for more than 50 years, and received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in

1979, died Sept. 5 of a heart attack.

BJP leaders are reported to be privately incensed at the remarks made by India's Prime Minister, Inder K. Gujral, who equated Mother Teresa with Mahatma Gandhi as "the two that showed India how to be good." Gujral insisted on a full state funeral for the diminutive nun, an honor usually reserved for presidents and prime ministers.

Over 80 per cent of India's 900 million people are Hindu, while the Christian population is barely two per cent.

Some BJP leaders insist that India should be rid of all non-Hindus. That belief has led to some missionaries being murdered, and discriminatory evangelization laws being promulgated in many states.

The most recent casualty was Christian evangelist Mangal Pande, who was beaten to death three months ago while spread-

ing the gospel in Bihar state.

BJP is backing the ironically named "Freedom of Religion Bill" which would prohibit conversions from one religion to another. The bill is aimed at preventing Christian evangelism, which has enjoyed growing success among India's lowest castes.

If the bill is enacted, a preacher may be arrested if accused of attempted conversion and could face a maximum jail term of one year or a fine up to 5000 Rupees (\$139 US) or both. The punishment will be doubled if the offense is committed against a minor, a woman, or a person belonging to the scheduled castes or scheduled tribes.

Similar bills have already been passed in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Arunachal Pradesh, although India's constitution guarantees the right to choose one's religion and to propagate it.

Bishops urge parents to accept gay children

Andrea Shalal-Esa

WASHINGTON (Reuter) — U.S. Catholic bishops released a pastoral letter recently urging parents to accept, love and respect their homosexual children and warning that rejection could lead to substance abuse or suicide.

The message, described as an "outstretched hand" to parents who learn that their children are gay, was developed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' committee on marriage and family.

"Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers," said the fundamental rights of homosexual men and women were to be respected and defended. "All of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression or violence against them," the message said.

The bishops said, "By itself ... a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful" because one cannot choose it and "morality presumes the freedom to choose." But the bishops went on to underscore the importance of chastity as "a way of respecting personal dignity."

Sex is for marriage

Living and loving chastely means that sexual intercourse is limited to marriage between a man and a woman. It highlights friendship as "a way of loving" and said friendship "outside of genital sexual involvement" should be an integral part of a homosexual person's life.

The bishops underscored the Catholic catechism that states homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity," and said the letter was meant to translate that message into a useful form

for parents and families.

The letter notes that parents need to accept themselves and their own struggle, to accept and love their children and to accept God's revelation about human dignity and sexuality. "Your child may need you and the family now more than ever. He or she is still the same person," the bishops said, noting that parents can often experience anger, relief, guilt and fear after learning of their child's sexual orientation.

The letter urged parents to seek counselling for themselves and their children, cautioning that a person's right to choose or refuse therapy needed to be respected. The message also included recommendations for priests, noting that "all homosexual persons have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the Word of God, and to receive pastoral care."

Reformed Church of Australia reaches out at synod

AUSTRALIA (REC) — The Reformed Churches of Australia (RCA) are showing a desire to reach out to more churches in their region and repair rifts within their membership.

At its triennial synod in early August, the denomination voted to approve relations with the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines. It also will seek contact with two more Presbyterian churches in Australia.

The RCA's closest relationship has historically been with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. The RCNZ has recently been critical of the Australians' adoption of a report on charismatic influences called *Word and Spirit*.

Three years ago, New Zealand's objections were not accepted by the RCA. The 1994 RCA synod added remarks about "prophecy" that caused unrest in the RCA. At this synod some

changes were made, at the request of some RCA classes, to clarify ambiguities in the report.

According to the synod reporter, the "RCA now has a series of declarations which firmly and clearly state its beliefs that the canon of Scripture is closed." The Geelong Theological Seminary, which has served both churches, also reported that contributions from the RCNZ were increasing.

Not everyone happy

But the declarations on *Word and Spirit* did not satisfy everyone. Later in the week, the synod adopted a statement noting "a common mind has not yet been reached," and it "urged [office bearers to teach and act] in such a way as to promote peace and harmony in the churches."

In addition, youth mission teams working in the Solomon Islands, east of Papua New

Guinea, have grown to the point where the synod appointed a staff worker there.

The synod also sent a clear warning that any form of abuse is unacceptable, and called on its churches to recognize that abuse involves church members.

A report on the matter made extensive use of an earlier report and study by the Christian Reformed Church.

An objection to the phrase in the Apostle's Creed, "He descended into hell," will be referred to the Reformed Ecumenical Council for advice.

A decision on ordaining women as deacons was defeated; delegates felt there were too many unanswered questions in the proposal. The synod sent it back to a committee. The committee was asked to clarify the difference between office and function, and also the difference between elders and deacons.

Muslim extremists bomb Christian bookstand in Turkey

ISTANBUL (Compass) — One person died and 25 were injured when a grenade exploded at a Christian bookstand on Sept. 14, the fifth day of the annual Gaziantep Industrial Trade Fair in southeastern Turkey. The grenade was thrown at a bookstand operated by the Turkish Good News Publishing Company (GNPC). The 9 p.m. attack killed four-year-old Ali Ozdemir and seriously wounded six others, including two who are still hospitalized.

According to provincial governor Muammer Guler, the military fragmentation grenade was thrown intentionally at the back of the booth. A bomb expert speaking on the local Gaziantep television station said that it was a miracle the grenade did not kill 50 or 60 people, since it exploded in the air. President Suleyman Demirel and Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz condemned the attack, which was given wide media coverage in Turkey.

"The Turkish police have arrested nine people who are members of the outlawed Islamic VASAD organization," said Mustafa Efe, the Turkish director of the GNPC. "The leader of this relatively new fundamentalist group is Sahmerdan Sari, a retired imam (prayer leader). The police found six more grenades of the same type, many weapons, explosives, illegal documents and copies of their magazine," Efe told Compass.

'We know how to close it'

Fair organizers had received complaints about the Christian bookstand in the days leading up to the attack, and bookstand workers had been threatened, even though civil police had determined that the Christian bookstand's activities and publications were legal.

"Don't sell these books." "Close this stand. If you don't, we know how to close it" were some of the threats with which they approached me," said Ibrahim Dogan, who was in charge of the bookstand. Dogan, 25, was one of the six people seriously injured in the explosion. He has been a Christian for two years.

Despite the threats, many local citizens from Gaziantep showed genuine interest in the bookstand and even asked if there were a Christian centre in the city. Some 800 books had been sold before the grenade attack took place.

Church

Chapter & Verse



Wayne Brouwer
 ● Andrew Kuyvenhoven
 Laura Smit
 Al Wolters

The promised land is the new earth

God's covenant with Abraham included the promise of a country. This land, at the Mediterranean Sea, is called Canaan after the son of Ham, or Palestine after the Philistines.

More than 500 years after God's first promise to Abraham, "Palestine" or "Canaan" was finally occupied by the offspring of Abraham. The date of the invasion, led by Joshua, was either 1400 or 1250 B.C. It was God's holy war.

The writers of the Old Testament believed that God faithfully fulfilled his promises to Abraham. God said that Abraham's children would be as numerous as "dust of the earth" and "stars in the sky" (Gen. 13:16, 15:5). Moses considered this promise fulfilled: "Today you are as many as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 1:10). And after the conquest of the land, Scripture says, "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled" (Josh. 21:45).

Still exiles

Due to its disobedience Israel lost the land. The North was scattered by Assyria (722 B.C.) and Judah was exiled to Babylon (586 B.C.). By God's grace a remnant returned. Yet after the exile, the Israelites were never completely free. "We are slaves in the land you gave us," said Nehemiah in his prayer of confession (Neh. 9). Except for a short period under the Maccabees, the people of Israel remained under foreign rulers. And in A.D. 70 they lost it all: the land, the capital and the temple.

By that time, however, the great change had occurred. Jesus the Messiah bore the sins of his people and was exalted to the throne of God. One era had ended and another had begun.

And what happened to the land? Jesus and Paul do not speak of a particular country that is to be inherited, but the earth is the promised land of God's people. Jesus blesses God's children and assures them they will inherit the "earth" or the "kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3-10, 25:34).

For Paul there is no longer a particular nation or territory to which God's promises are tied. Note how he subtly changes the promise of the land, given to Abraham, into a promise of the earth! "Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13).

When Paul quotes the second commandment, in which God promises the obedient that they "may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you," he translates into New Testament language: "That you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:3).

Vastly bigger

The inheritance of God's children is vastly bigger than Palestine: the inheritance is God himself and the whole renewed universe. The real Promised Land is ahead of us, says the letter to the Hebrews (is, the Jews). "Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Follow the better Joshua (Jesus) who leads believers to the Promised Land (3:7-4:11).

If we accept the teaching of the New Testament as the norm for the understanding of the Old Testament, Palestine as the Promised Land was an Old Testament symbol for the true inheritance of God's people. Today Palestine is neither a holy land nor a promised land. The Promised Land is the new world to which we travel. And Christ guides the tour.

Andrew Kuyvenhoven is a retired Christian Reformed pastor who lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., which isn't the Promised Land either.

Conservative Episcopalians call their church's leaders to reformation

PAWLEY'S ISLAND, S.C. (EP) — Approximately 30 Episcopal clergy gathered Sept. 8 and 9 to draft a document calling for dramatic reformation in the leadership of the Episcopal Church USA. The document, called "The First Promise," is an "open letter" to Episcopal clergy, calling them and the church leadership to repent and return to the church's biblical roots. The letter is named for the first promise Episcopal clergy make at their ordination: to uphold the gospel.

Revised gospel?

"There is a very strong and unbending group of people who are now the majority voice [in the Episcopal Church]," the Rev. Chuck Murphy told Warren Smith of the *Charlotte Christian News*. Murphy is rector of All Saints' Waccamaw Church, the Pawley's Island church where the gathering took place.

"That group is determined to move the church away from its biblical roots toward a new understanding of who God is. My responsibility — and our responsibility as clergy — is to uphold the gospel as we have received it, not as it has been

revised," Murphy added.

The document mentions several actions taken at the Episcopal Church's recent triennial general convention in Philadelphia as precipitating events for the gathering and "The First Promise" document.

One action was a resolution passed requiring all bishops and clergy to accept the ordination of women. The Episcopal Church has for 20 years ordained women, but four conservative bishops, citing theological objections, have refused to ordain women or to accept ordained women clergy in their dioceses.

The Rev. Thomas Johnston, one of the document's signators, said, "Even many clergy who support the ordination of women were outraged by this new requirement that compels bishops to go against their consciences."

Theologically mushy

Murphy was more blunt: "We are in a church that is so theologically mushy that we cannot compel clergy to affirm the Resurrection or a biblical understanding of the person of Jesus, but now we pass canons that compel clergy to accept the ordination of women."

"The First Promise" calls on clergy to consider taking nine actions to express their concern over the state of the Episcopal Church, including withholding their local church's funds from the diocese and from the national church.

A next step in the process of calling the church to reforma-

tion occurred on Sept. 27 when Johnston and Jon Shuler presented "The First Promise" to a group of approximately 60 bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America gathered in Dallas.

The Pawley's Island clergy are not expecting the bishops to publicly adopt "The First Promise," but hope that the document will serve as a catalyst to help the bishops adopt their own statement.

Concern and frustration

Many bishops from the worldwide Anglican Communion have already expressed concern and frustration with the American church's leadership. In a statement on human sexuality adopted earlier this year in Kuala Lumpur, bishops from around the world affirmed traditional teaching on human sexuality and chastised the American church for departing from these teachings. "The First Promise" explicitly affirms the Kuala Lumpur statement.

"The First Promise" has been sent to the national leadership of the Episcopal Church, including Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning and Presiding Bishop-Elect Frank Griswold, III. Neither man has publicly commented on the document, but Jim Solheim, news director for the Episcopal Church USA, said, "The bishops will take it very seriously." He added that this sort of activism from conservatives within the church "is not new, but it is, of course, troubling."

Relentless rabbi has no room for grace

JERUSALEM, Israel (EP) — Women who wear wigs are cursed by God, according to one of Israel's most powerful rabbis. "Both she and her wig will be burned in hell," claimed Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, spiritual leader of the Shas political party.

In a sermon to male Jewish seminary students, Yosef said that if a woman wears a wig to synagogue, both she and her husband should be excommunicated. In Orthodox Judaism, married women cover their heads as a sign of modesty. But some Orthodox Jews believe that realistic wigs are immodest.

That belief has led to vandalism at some wig shops. "If the woman wishes for righteous children, let her remove the wig, if not, she shall have impertinent children," said Yosef.

Last year the Iraqi-born rabbi called for the death penalty for Sabbath-breakers, and he recently said smokers should be punished with 40 lashes.



Voortman

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Feature

Media non-events: numbing North America

Ron DeBoer

Pop quiz. What do Johnny Cochran, Tickle Me Elmo, Kari Strug and Donovan Bailey have in common?

Give up? They are the main characters in some of the most talked about and numbing media stories of the 1990s. Or test your knowledge on some of these: Susan Smith, Jessica McLure, Kato Kalin, and Jon-Benet Ramsey. If you find at least the names recognizable, you have been touched by a "non-event."

A media non-event is a story of little significance — except for those directly involved — until the media, in its various forms, decides to tell the rest of the world that the event is, in fact, significant. There are basically two types of non-events: the news-story non-event and the commercially driven non-event.

Speculation to feed emotions

News sources like CNN (Cable News Network) and many national newspapers exhaust themselves advancing the storyline of events in an effort to emotionally enfold audiences. The O.J. Simpson trial became a racial issue with blacks pitted against whites. The Donovan Bailey/Michael Johnson 150 meter "race of the century" became the expression of nationalistic rivalry between Canada and the United States, but limped off the headlines quickly when no real race emerged.

Kari Strug, the U.S. gymnast who sprained her ankle then vaulted the U.S. women's gymnastics team to a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics, embodied courage for some, child abuse to others. The stories cannot stand on their own as stories. News sources speculate, allege and sometimes outright fictionalize to develop a plot.

The effect on the public is palpable. During the O.J. Simpson trial, people offered their own sometimes bizarre hypotheses about who the killer might be, pointing fingers at detectives and even O.J. Simpson's own son, as if they were viewing a Sunday night murder mystery movie.

Commercial fiction

The second type of media non-event is nurtured by cor-

porate North America. Super Bowl commercials by Pepsi, IBM or Nike are as eagerly anticipated by many as the game itself. In Canada, Nescafe and Labatt's have captivated audiences with continuing storylines that sometimes carry on for years. Corporate non-events become questionable when reputable network news programs help advance the storyline of what corporations hope the public will perceive as an important event.

In the summer of 1995, for example, national networks NBC and, in Canada, CBC, opened their telecasts with the much-awaited disclosure of Microsoft's Windows '95 software, and news cameras were rolling a few years back when Paramount Pictures unveiled the painting of their soon-to-be-released movie *Last Action Hero* on the facing of the U.S. space shuttle.

Something is drastically wrong when both the government and mainstream news programs (two institutions we tend to trust) are being utilized by corporations to create non-events with specific commercial interests.

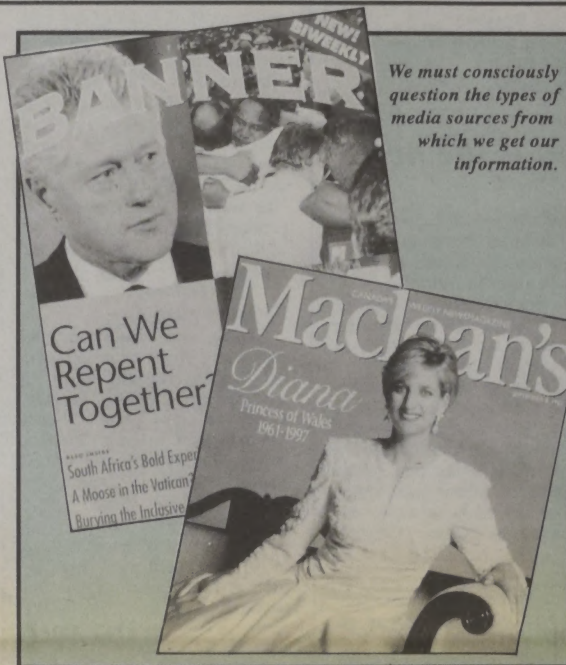
For the good of Nike

In big, "important" sporting events, NBC spends a great deal of energy interviewing and hyping certain athletes — like Chicago Bulls basketball star Michael Jordan or golf sensation Tiger Woods. Is it surprising that Nike pays these athletes millions of dollars a year to endorse its products? Is it surprising Nike is one of NBC's biggest advertising clients?

Even the Donovan Bailey/Michael Johnson race wasn't so much an athletic event as it was a tug-of-war between Nike and Adidas, which endorse each athlete.

Adidas was the real winner of this race. The two-hour coverage of the race and then Bailey's post-race interview — the Adidas logo emblazoned on his chest — was one big commercial for the athletic company. But Nike isn't fretting much. It's reported there will be a rematch.

CNN has played a major role in creating non-events. Earlier this year, when the O.J. Simpson civil case verdict was announced, CNN was hard-pressed



We must consciously question the types of media sources from which we get our information.

to send TV audiences to President Clinton's state-of-the-union address and promised to inform viewers immediately should the verdict come during Clinton's speech. Since many viewers see CNN as a responsible and authoritative voice of world events, the message adopted by millions is that how much O.J. Simpson has to pay his victims is much more important than government policy, international relations and budget issues.

The very democracy of our countries is placed at risk as non-events consume us. Writer Ray Bradbury expands the definition of non-events. He points out in his post-war novel *Fahrenheit 451* that when citizens become so distracted, consumed and numbed by baseball statistics, soap opera cliff-hangers and inner city criminal activity shown continuously on television, the election process in a democratic country suffers. Citizens, he maintains, simply don't know political party platforms or even party candidates. In Canada, less than 50 per cent of the voting population bothers to visit the polls.

Canada's beloved CBC, too, is leaning toward sensational news. On a recent Sunday night broadcast of "The National," of the first five stories, three

covered recent murders, one was about domestic violence, and the other showed the images of a burning building, the work of a suspected arsonist.

Dead off TV

The problem is many of us don't view these events as non-events. We see only the "event-ness" that media creates out of the non-event. Author and sociologist Robert Bly maintains that no one effectively objects to the obvious non-events when a large enough audience is simultaneously watching. We still truly believe that if something's on television, it must be important.

If you flip this notion around — that what isn't on television is not important — you see how our thinking becomes shaped by media.

For example, after the initial interest in the Hollywood-style infiltration of the Japanese embassy in Peru by terrorists, news sources basically dropped the story when no plot advanced. During the two year Simpson ordeal, tens of thousands were massacred in Rwanda, yet we hardly heard a whisper on television or in newspapers.

Unlike the Rwanda and Japanese Embassy stories, the Simpson story continued with

new plot-twists and emerging characters which captured audiences' imaginations. While CNN may be criticized for becoming the O.J. Channel, most of the reputable TV networks — including the CBC — led their news broadcasts with a lengthy O.J. update each evening.

Responding to non-events

We need to start by breaking out of our media trances and consciously question the types of media sources from which we get our information. Many Canadians get most of their news from the United States since the majority of us live within 100 miles of the border.

How does American news affect our lives? Perhaps you've heard of the town in Saskatchewan which, via satellite, was able for the first time to pick up news stations from Detroit back in the '60s. The result? Record sales in locks and home security systems for a town in which crime was virtually non-existent.

Since most of North America's mainstream newspapers and news programs have become increasingly "tabloidized" in the 1990s, we need also to question the types of news stories and "events" that are capturing our imaginations.

Does the knowledge we learn help us as Christians respond to the world around us, or are we indulging purely for entertainment?

If it were not for television news, how could Canadians possibly have comprehended the destruction and horror of the Red River flooding in Manitoba? Thanks to news, viewers from the coast to the Maritimes could send supplies and later volunteer to clean-up the mess.

But I suspect the majority of non-event news items merely entertain us, and most of these stories serve only to paint a landscape of our world as a place that is unsafe, a place that is to be feared at every turn, a place in which your own family cannot be trusted.

If, in fact, we are watching news for entertainment, then we must also make a conscious effort to balance non-event information with public policy issues that affect our families, communities and country, news stories that engage our brains and not just our eyeballs.

Ron DeBoer is a teacher who lives in Waterloo, Ont. E-mail: deboerr@hotmail.com

Feature

Miracles take a little longer

by
Thelma Pattenden



Jamie walked down the path and climbed the fence separating the farm yard from the grassy bank sloping towards the river. His dog, Winston, ran ahead, sniffing at rabbit holes, then raced back to Jamie, who was trying to make him hurry.

But there was nothing to hurry for. Bending down, Jamie picked up a smooth, flat stone, rubbed it between his fingers and sent it skipping across the river. One, two, three. That was the best he'd ever done. He wandered on, looking for another stone. It was boring in this small town; there was never anything to do.

Winston trotted back and pressed close to him, then reached up and licked his hand. "Good dog, Winston." The boy sat looking at the river, his arm around the warm comforting body.

Tears ran down his cheeks when he remembered how

neat it had been, living in Christchurch. They'd had such a lot of fun, he and his mom.

That night she'd said "Let's have fish and chips for tea. You stay here, it's too wet for you to come. I'll take the bike, I'll only be five minutes."

But his mom hadn't come home in five minutes, or ten or twenty. He'd had a feeling something must have happened, because Mom always kept her word and wouldn't have left him on his own all that time. Then had come the knock on the door and a man's voice. "Is anyone there? It's the police. Please open the door."

The police officer had told him about the drunken driver coming around the corner on the wrong side of the road, crashing into Mom and her poor old bike, and how she'd died straight away. Then the social worker had come and taken him to her house for the night.

There'd only been him and Mom. His dad had left and gone to Australia when Jamie was a baby, but they hadn't missed him. It had been so much fun, just being with Mom. Now there was just him, in this small, dusty town with nothing to do except throw stones in a stupid river.

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts were very kind to him; they did all

they could to make him happy and he did try hard to settle in. But it wasn't his home.

And now he really was disgusted. The first Sunday he had been with the Roberts they had taken him to church. Jamie had never been in a church and loved the stained glass windows, the friendliness of the people and the singing. And he was sure the man who stood up the front and talked about the power of prayer had said you could get just about anything you wanted by praying for it.

So he started his prayers. He didn't say anything to anyone else about it, just prayed and prayed, every day, the same prayer.

"Please God, find my dad and send him here."

But nothing had happened. Not a word, not a letter, nothing at all. Either he hadn't heard right or God wasn't listening. This morning he'd decided he wasn't going to waste any more time praying. When he was grown up he'd go and find his dad himself.

Drying his tears, he found another smooth, flat stone, rubbed it between his fingers and sent it across the river. It skipped once and sank with a splash.

"Come on, Winston, we'd better get back. It must be time for lunch."

There was a strange car outside the gate and he wondered whose it was. Mrs. Roberts met him at the door.

"There you are, Jamie. We thought you'd got lost. There's a visitor waiting in the lounge for you."

"Dad," yelled Jamie, and raced through the door. He stopped and stared at the woman by the window. She looked just like Mom. She had the same color hair, was the same height, but different

somehow.

"Hello, Jamie," the woman smiled. "I'm your Auntie Lyn, your mom's big sister. We've just found out about the accident and where you were living and I came as soon as I could. We're so glad we've found you."

Jamie just stared at her. It wasn't his dad after all, just a silly old aunt who looked like his mom.

"Jamie, aren't you going to say hello?"

"No. I thought you'd be my dad," he sobbed. "I've been praying and praying he'd come, and it's only you. It's not fair."

"Oh you poor little kid." She put her arms around him and hugged him, talking quietly. "Could you stop crying and listen? Did you know you've got a grandma and grandpa in Auckland and two uncles and lots of cousins?"

Jamie shook his head. "Well you have, and we would love to have you come and live with us."

Jamie looked up at her. "Live with you. You mean in a real home?"

"A real home. Your Uncle Ted and I live on the farm where your mom lived when she was your age."

Jamie thought hard. "Do you go to church?"

"His aunt hugged him hard. 'Yes, we do. Every Sunday. Why?'"

"Well then, if I come to live with you, do you think I could learn a bit more about this 'power of prayer' business? It doesn't work the way I thought it would."

His aunt laughed kissed him. "I'm sure you could learn, Jamie."

Thelma Pattenden is a free-lance writer who lives in Napier, New Zealand

Environment

Fighting cattails with cattails



A pristine part of the Florida Everglades.

Everglades restoration project looks promising

Marian Van Til

THE EVERGLADES, Fla. — Due to massive population growth, greed and a profound misunderstanding of "worthless" swamps and wetlands, more than half the Florida Everglades — hundreds of thousands of acres of what Marjory Stoneman Douglas called in 1947 a "river of grass" — have since been destroyed, drained and filled, dotted with canals and turned into suburbs, resorts or sugar cane fields.

Recently scientists, politicians and the public have belatedly come to realize the environmental value of the original wetlands which used to make up virtually all of southern Florida. One of the biggest full-scale environmental restoration campaigns is now being undertaken to try to reverse decades of human abuse.

The project, which will extend into the next century, will cost between \$3 billion and \$5 billion (US) but will be able to save only about half of the original Everglades.

Unfiltered water

The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that the restoration plan "seeks to reverse the detrimental effects of a system of 1,400 miles of canals and levees built in the 1950s and 1960s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ... to prevent floods and create dry land for farming."

Those canals draw off 40 per cent of the fresh water that once

flowed through this giant swamp. That water now goes directly to the ocean. That has caused a 95 per cent drop in the number of wading birds from a century ago and the placing of more than 50 species of plants and animals on the threatened or endangered species lists.

When water flowed through the swamp before reaching the ocean, its year-long journey provided habitat for countless wildlife and plant species and then, at the bay, "mixed with saltwater over acres of sea grass, providing a productive nursery for fish and shrimp," says *The Monitor*.

Fertilizer poisoning

That huge volume of water also recharged the Biscayne Aquifer, "a massive slab of porous rock that underlies much of the populated section of southeast Florida," writes *The Monitor's* Warren Richey. "Less water in the river of grass has meant less water for Miami. As a result, saltwater from the sea now intrudes into the aquifer, threatening the region's main water supply."

The canals make large-scale farming possible, but fertilizer run-off is drastically changing the remaining Everglades. Fertilizer nourishes phosphorous-loving plants like cattails, which are crowding out acre upon acre of native saw grass, reports Richey.

What to do?

Environmental biologists have a unique solution. They're fighting cattails with cattails. Along the L-7 canal north of the

A Bison question under the 'big sky'

We each grabbed hold of a bony horn and hoisted the skull from its resting place. It had been weathering outside, but was still heavy with encrusting salts. Between the empty eye sockets arched a massive brow. Here was a head made for clearing snow in a Canadian winter. It was also equal to matching the charge of a rival bull.

I wonder what Job, or the psalmist would say had they gazed on these true North American beauties? And what were people thinking, just over a hundred years ago, when the great bison herds were disappearing? We have our environmental debates today, but what questions were they asking?

Looking for the missing dissenters

They swallow you, these great Western prairies. They grip you with a dry wind, then wrap you up in the rolling landscape and huge skies that never seem to end. That happened to me again a few weeks ago when I headed south from my familiar woodlands. I grew up with trees and forest species. So, the 'big sky country' is always a bit foreign to me.

This trip through the grasslands and hoisting that bison skull sent me down a mental path. The historical records I have read often give voice to the arguments for removing the bison from North America. But I seldom read of the dissenters to that slaughter.

Today almost everyone agrees that it was a great tragedy. Sixty million animals were reduced to about 1000 individuals in less than 40 years! But looking back at it now, it seems inevitable that free-roaming bison must be controlled in some way. The thought of a herd of one-ton animals roaming in and out of town, farm, or wherever doesn't make much sense.

But how was the decision made? Was it easy for people to reach this conclusion? Were there any dissenters in the crowd? Did anyone suggest that it could be done another way?

Are we making hard choices too easy?

The point here is that decisions like this must be hard to make. At least they are if you want to do the right thing, not just the most

Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, for example, biologist Nicholas Aumen and other scientists are, as Richey describes it, "using a 3,800 acre patch of cattails and other fast growing plants to act as a huge natural filter to suck the fertilizer out of the runoff water, permitting cleaner water to be discharged into the Everglades."

If the water leaving the "filter marsh" is clean enough it should be able to support saw grass, which will re-establish itself. The results look promising. Water clarity is much greater in the experimental marsh (which



John Wood

expedient or obvious one at the moment. Few in hindsight would recommend the course that history actually took in this case. But can we hope to do any better today? I think we can — and we must. But to do so takes more than good will; it takes a change of heart.

Problems like the bison question remind me of the common struggle of humanity. We are all faced with these difficult choices. But where are we going to come down on the bison-like questions of our day?

Some see the creation as a mere backdrop for our human drama. It is a kind of disposable world that is useful for staging the human drama, but of little concern otherwise. It will either be burned up or destroyed by wicked humans, so there is little we can or should do about it. Others point to the relational character of us humans and the earth. It doesn't take much looking in Scripture to find numerous references to human responsibility to care for God's creatures.

Hard to do the right thing?

I think that Cain struggled with something like this problem and came out with the wrong answer. He didn't have the right sacrifice. But he thought, "What's wrong with God? What does he expect of me? I am a gardener. I don't have animals to spare." So when faced with a difficult choice he took what seemed like a reasonable pathway at the time. It was foolish and evil, something we would never do. But I wonder sometimes if the pathways are always that clear to us.

I was wondering about this as I hefted that bison skull and looked into those empty sockets. It is enough to make you open up the Scriptures and lay them out along side the daily newspaper, and repent.

John R. Wood teaches environmental science at The King's University College in Edmonton.

has been "operating" since 1994) than expected: in 1996 phosphorous levels were 24 parts per billion when 50 parts per billion were targeted (water coming into the marsh contains 120 parts per billion of phosphorous). So far, there have been no observable effects of the phosphorous on the Everglades animals that inhabit the experimental cattail marsh.

More to come

The filter marsh has been deemed so successful that a second one is being constructed on 2,280 acres north of the Big

Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation. Five others are currently being designed.

"Eventually," says *The Monitor*, "the string of filter marshes will buffer the natural Everglades from some 700,000 acres of sugar fields and other farms." But the only way to truly restore the Everglades, the biologists say, is to provide the kind of proper, careful balance that existed for thousands of years when saw grass covered these wetlands.

Comment

You need to be yourself — at church, too

Dear Elizabeth:

I was talking with a friend the other day about authenticity. She said that often we take social expectations so seriously we lose that which is most precious and unique about ourselves. We lose our better selves in doing what we think others want us to do.

The example she gave took place back in her college years. She is a wonderful Christian with a very spectacular testimony, and the college she was attending asked her to give her testimony at numerous college promotional events. While on one hand she really felt she was doing what people wanted her to do and she received much appreciation for her sharing, on the other hand she felt a little used and a little, well, *fake*. It was too much.

Another friend was dating outside Reformed

I think some people get frustrated with themselves because they know they are not measuring up to the standards they feel the community has set up for them.

Christian circles, and the view from the outside was that Reformed Christians had high expectations for their people: substantial financial contributions, successful business ventures, good solid theology, and wonderful families. This, too, was too much.

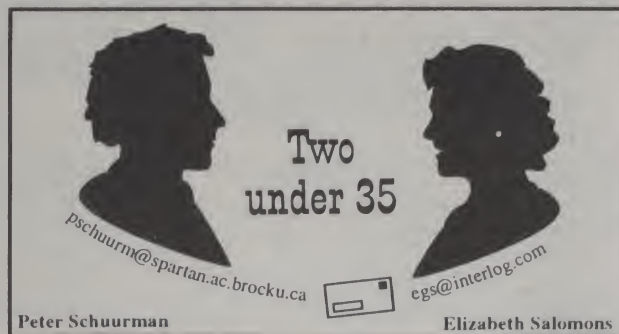
I think some people get frustrated with themselves because they know they are not measuring up to the standards they feel the community has set up for them. One friend said with frustration, "I can't keep worrying about what everyone else will think! It's too much. I'm just going to follow this." He pointed at his heart. "I've got to trust it first."

The heart can be deceitful, however. Maybe what he meant was the "still small voice" that comes after competing noises have quieted. Regardless, I don't think we can find our way out-side of some community. The question is *which* community or culture will provide us with the expectations we need to give us guidance in life. A Christ-following community, however imperfect, provides me with best opportunity to be what God intended me to be.

"I deeply admire the Christian Reformed Church," said the Brock Inter-Varsity staff worker to me today, "for their commitment to Christian ministry in higher education. I just wish my church was like that."

"Yes," I smiled. "I wish your church were more like mine, too."

With a healthy sort of ambivalence,
Peter



Dear Peter:

Hmmmm. Your letter makes me think of a friend of my sister's. She was raised a Catholic and, through her relationship with my sister, came to the Christian Reformed Church and professed her faith there. One Sunday morning after the service, over our traditional cup of coffee, a group of us were trying to make plans to get together for a movie or dinner or something, I can't remember exactly what.

We were having trouble finding a night that matched everybody's schedule, and in frustration this friend threw up her hands and said, "I'm too busy being Reformed!"

She was referring to the fact that church events had filled up her entire week. We all laughed, but I was a little shocked. Is this what being Reformed means to somebody new to the CRC? Filling up one's calendar with church-related activities?

Remember the "cultural-engagers" label you and I have talked about? Our generation has so much more to fill our lives with than previous generations. This is the 500-channel universe, in which entertainment and celebrities provide us with a mythology unlike anything ever seen before. It's not just Hollywood: some winters, I probably see more live theatre than I do movies. And when I told my brother, who lives in Edmonton, about the time I recently went to hear Michael Ondaatje do a reading at the University of Toronto, I could almost see him drool with envy.

I was a bit nonchalant with him about the cultural opportunities I have in Toronto, but I realize I already take some of these for granted. So what am I saying here? Almost all of my social activities lie outside the parameters of "church" life. And I am enjoying it immensely and resent anyone who suggests that because I don't involve myself in at least two church committees and attend worship every week that somehow I am less of a committed Christian.

Those are the expectations I read from my Reformed community and those are the expectations I watched my family live up to while I was growing up. Frankly, I still have a lot of resentment at how much the church permeated my family's life, and at what cost. So maybe I'm acting out a little adolescent rebellion here, but I will not have my social life revolve around my church membership. Some of my most important friendships involve non-Christians simply because of the window they offer me to the world, a world I hardly knew existed before the age of 20.

Authenticity. To me that means being true to who you are. But I also strongly believe you can never escape where you come from. The community you and I grew up in, Peter, by the grace of God, has provided us with an excellent and secure foundation in which to establish ourselves as citizens of the Kingdom of God. But God's Kingdom is much, much larger than the Christian Reformed Church, and it's to this Kingdom that I claim citizenship. That shouldn't be a conflict. But somehow it seems to be.

Truthfully yours,
Elizabeth

Elizabeth Salomons is a freelance editor who lives in Toronto and is a member of First CRC there. Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Church's chaplain at Brock University. He is a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines.

Advice/Poetry

Spiritually lost children need love, prayer

Dear P & M:

I've had this letter on my heart since your January 3 column when a mother wrote to say, "We sent our kids to the Christian school, but it didn't help. Look at them now. They don't love the Lord. They just go their own way." We find ourselves in the same boat and know this writer's anger, guilt and sadness. We understand her grief.

I don't agree with the mother who wrote you later to say that you should keep telling your children [about what's right]. They know already. Despite our shortcomings, we showed them the way of the Lord. We had the help of the Christian school. Nevertheless, our prayers notwithstanding, they decided against the Lord.

When our son told me, we both cried. He said, "Mom, you know I don't want to hurt you but I cannot believe there is a God." I cried for two days. We then decided we

would not argue about it, because we did not want to lose him. The welcome mat is always out for our children.

That feeling of welcome would disappear if we always reminded them that they're on the wrong path. Pretty soon we wouldn't see them anymore, neither would we be able to show them God's love. Interestingly, our son leaves the table when we read the Bible after meals. He sits in another room, yet corrects me if I

don't pronounce a word right. So he is listening after all.

We should not always blame our own family situations. There are so many things that shape young people. Because of this, it's especially important to be there for your children, especially when they stray from the Lord. Help them in any way that you can so that they know they can always go to Mom and Dad. They need that listening ear, that extra hug. So when they face difficulties, I say, "I will be thinking of you." Deep down, our children know that I really mean that I'll be praying for them.

Two books by Barbara Johnson have been a tremendous support. The first is called *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* (don't you love the title?); the second has the title *Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life*. Johnson addresses our tendency to pick up our worries again after we've prayed to God and said Amen. She suggests a mental picture that sees us bringing and leaving a child with Jesus. The accompanying drawing gets the idea across. She suggests putting the drawing in a place where you can see it everyday.

A while back, I said to my pastor, "My son is not a Christian." You know what he said? "Not yet." How right he was!

We have also received a lot of support from a prayer group set up especially for straying children. We've kept it

Peter and Marja



are
IN

up for five years since my friend, whose son also refuses to come to church, asked me, "What would you think of starting a prayer group for lost children?" I said I would love it, because now I could do something. We meet every first Monday of the month. Anyone is welcome. We have people who come for their grandchildren, their husbands or wives, and most of all for their children. Our core group has grown to 25 persons. A tremendous bond has developed between us.

Our format is very simple. Someone opens with a poem, a biblical text, a reading that has touched them, or a taped song. Sometimes a person opens with a story or a testimony of someone who has returned to the Lord. Then everyone gets a turn to talk about the person about whom they're worried. Sometimes we laugh; often we cry; always we pray. Depending how we feel, our prayers may be silent or spoken.

When we're done, the people who need it most get hugged. We go home with a list of all the people for whom we prayed. In our daily devotions, we pray for two of these persons at a time. Sometimes we send these individuals a card. Remember, this prayer group prays only for persons who have lost their faith. We don't pray for the sick unless one of these individuals is ill.

Have our children come back? Actually, our son and our daughter have no idea that we go to this prayer group and that so many people are praying for them. And the truth is that only some of the loved ones we pray for have returned to God (yet). But we trust that God will take care of them. He is just, but also merciful. The miracle is that we are learning to give it over to the Lord.

My advice? Start a group like this and you will be blessed. Just get a few people to agree to come. Then put a notice in your church bulletin and start. You will be surprised at who comes out. And the next thing you know, you'll not be so lonely anymore. It doesn't matter if someone's afraid to pray out loud in a group setting. You can always come just to listen or to tell your story. That's all part of prayer.

Dear Praying for the Straying:

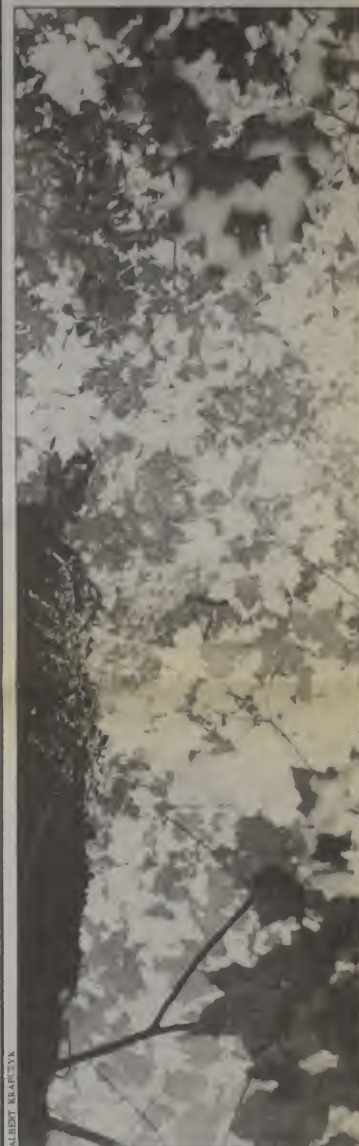
Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I first loved you." You have obviously decided to obey him in the way you relate to your children.

Your advice cannot be improved upon by us, so we will say only "Amen!" and pass it along to our readers. May you see the day when you can tell the group that there's rejoicing in heaven because your children have come home to Him.

Write to: P & M, 16 Kimbermount Drive, St. Catharines, ON L5N 5V6

Peter and Marja Slofsra are a pastor and wife team living in St. Catharines, Ont. They are assisted by an advisory panel consisting of Herman de Jong, Bill Lulkea, Alan Vandermaas, Marian Van Til and Bert Witvoet.

The trees



Their garments, worn, came off and fluttered to the ground. The wind came by and picked them up and scattered them around. Disrobed they stand and mourn, their nakedness displayed. And I, who saw it come to pass, grew evermore afraid.

If I knew not that in my soul a seed that lasts forever grows, nor knew that through my life a stream of living water flows, how threatening would this season be!

These thoughts, however, comfort me.

Didy Prinzen
Orono, Ont.

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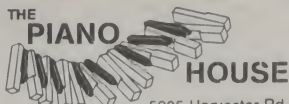
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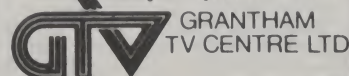
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If you wish a photo included, send us the original. d) <i>Christian Courier</i> will not be responsible for any errors due to handwritten or phoned-in advertisements. e) The rate shown above for classifieds covers any length up to five column inches. <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to charge for additional column inches at the rate of \$15.00 per column inch (GST incl.). NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS We offer a one-year subscription for only \$25.00 (GST incl.) to the couples whose wedding is announced in the <i>Christian Courier</i> and to the parents of the child whose birth announcement appears in our paper. To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request the wedding or birth announcement to enclose \$25.00 and the couple's correct address. Christian Courier 4-261 Martindale Rd. St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1 Phone: (905) 682-8311 Fax: (905) 682-8313	BOSCHMAN: We will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving as we celebrate the 80th birthday of our father and grandfather GERRIT BOSCHMAN on Nov. 7, 1997 An open house will be held in his honor on Saturday, Nov. 8, 1997, from 2-4 p.m., at the Hope Chr. Ref. Church Hall, 17 Patterson Ave., Brantford, Ont. Everyone welcome! Correspondence address: R.R. 7, Brantford, ON N3T 5L9	With grace, faith and dignity HENRY MEETSMA beloved husband of Grace, went home to be with his Lord, on Wednesday, Oct. 1, 1997, at the age of 80 years. Formerly from Barhead and Neerlandia, Alta. he passed on peacefully with loved ones at his side at the Rosedale Hospice, Calgary, after a lengthy battle with cancer. Born in Zandbulten, Friesland, the Neth., on Jan. 13, 1917, he married Grace Runia in Leeuwarden on June 21, 1944. He enjoyed a successful 49 year career as a mechanic. Henry and Grace emigrated to Canada in 1953 with three children and settled in Barhead, Alta., where two sons were added to the family. From 1965 to the present they resided in Calgary, except for a seven year period when he owned and operated Meetsma Motors in Neerlandia, Alta. Active by faith and in deed, he helped build and served on council in the Christian Reformed Church. Henry will be sadly missed by his beloved wife of 53 years, Grace, their children and spouses: Gerald (Elizabeth) — Edmonton Arnold (Emmy) — Calgary Patricia (Jerry VanderWal) — Victoria Henry (Margaret) Monville Richard — Calgary He is also survived by his 12 grandchildren: Marilyn (Al), Michael (Brenda), Bryan (Emily), Jason, Sharlene (David), Arend, Matthew, Christopher, Steven, Angela, DJ and Petra, and two great-grandchildren, David and Chantel. Also survived by sisters Mane and Janna in the Netherlands, brothers Frntz and Siep in Germany. If friends so desire, memorial donations may be made directly to the Calgary Hospice (Rosedale), 920-7A St. NW, Calgary, AB T2M 3J3. Interment took place at Queen's Park Cemetery, on Friday, Oct. 3, 1997, followed by a memorial service at First Chr. Ref. Church. Correspondence address: Grace Meetsma, #214-505 56 Ave. SW, Calgary, AB T2G 0T6. Phone: (403) 253-2466.	Alphen a/d Rijn Owen Sound the Neth. Ont. Nov. 25, 1909 - Sept. 24, 1997 HERMINA POSTHUMUS-NAGTEGAAL Peacefully, at Summit Place Nursing Home, Owen Sound, Ont., with her husband by her side, Hermina went home to Jesus. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). She will be missed by her loving husband of 64 years, Andrew, and by her children and their spouses: Wietse & Avelina Posthumus — Ottawa, Ont. Rita & Tom Taylor — Newmarket, Ont. Hennie & Joe Hilverda — Guelph, Ont. Leni & Peter Vanderkooij — Bradford, Ont. Helen & Mike Dykstra — Clinton, Ont. Herman & Brenda Posthumus — Owen Sound, Ont. Andy & Laurie Posthumus — Peterborough, Ont. Lovingly remembered by 24 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren. Also survived by one sister, Cornelia Markus of the Netherlands. Correspondence address: Andrew Posthumus, 155 4th Avenue West, Apt. #205, Owen Sound, ON N4K 6W4	GOING TO HOLLAND FOR VACATION? Why not rent a VACATION APARTMENT and visit family and sight-see at your leisure. CENTRALLY LOCATED near APELDOORN. Year-round accommodations. FOR BROCHURE OR MORE INFORMATION CALL Harold or Nellie at (905) 985-7891 or fax us at (905) 985-3007 e-mail: hamel@idirect.com
	Obituaries Brampton Brouwershaven Ont. Zeeland, the Neth. Nov. 28, 1913 - Oct. 5, 1997 "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5:1,2). This longing became reality when our beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather REV. PETER MARINUS JONKER at the age of 83, entered into the presence of his Lord, whom he so faithfully and with great joy served in his life. Alida Jonker-Hoogendoom — Brampton, Ont. Leo & Irene Jonker — Kingston, Ont. Herman & Magda Jonker — Kitchener, Ont. Roland & Coby Jonker — Toronto, Ont. Peter Jonker — Saskatoon, Sask. Daughter, predeceased Sept. 1994, Alma Riepma Son-in-law Clarence & (Judy) Margot & Bart Vegt — Langley, B.C. Son, predeceased March 1983, John Daughter-in-law JoAnne & (Archie Lohr) Martin & Antoinetta Jonker — Abbotsford, B.C. Caroline & Ron Leenstra — Maple Ridge, B.C. 27 grandchildren, one of which died in 1980 at age 10, and seven great-grandchildren. Correspondence address: Alida Jonker, Holland Christian Homes, Apt. C-808, 7900 McLaughlin Rd. S., Brampton, ON L6Y 5A7	Church News Christian Reformed Church Calls accepted: — Lindsay, Ont., Rev. Ronald V. Luchies, Lucknow, Ont. Calls extended: — First, Guelph, Ont., Rev. Jake Kuipers, of First, Samia, Ont. — Wallaceburg, Ont., Rev. Richard T. Vander Vaart of Bethel, Saskatoon, Sask.	Teachers FRUITLAND, ONT.: John Knox Memorial Christian School invites applications for two maternity-leave situations in the 1997-1998 school year. Full-time Grade 4/5 classroom teacher position to commence on Jan. 5, 1998; part-time Grade 4-8 music specialist position to commence on Feb. 23, 1998. The ideal candidates will possess a valid provincial or state teacher certificate, a Christian School Teacher Certificate (CSTC) and have several years of successful teaching experience. Persons interested in this position should contact: Mr. J. de Jager, Principal, at 905-643-2460 for more information as well as to receive application forms. Applications will be received until the position has been filled.	For Sale SJOELBAKKEN Dutch Shuffleboards, hardwood, heavy duty. \$135, shipping, taxes incl., Can. & U.S.A. D. & J. Koomans R.R. #3, Chatham, ON N7M 5J3 (519) 351-7667
	Personal ONE TO ANOTHER Christian companion magazine. Hundreds of readers Canada-wide. Single issue \$5. Write to: #12 923 2nd Ave. S. Lethbridge, AB T1J 0C7		For Rent CLINTON, ONTARIO ADULT LIFE LEASE RESIDENCES available, 936 sq.ft. to 1235 sq.ft. Fully wheelchair accessible, sprinkler system, central air, security throughout building. Dutch and English spoken. For more info, call (519) 233-7296 or (519) 482-7862.	
ATTENTION! If you are considering sending us an ad via fax, please be sure to: • send printed or typed copy • include billing address • include contact person with phonenumber. Thank You.		Church News Christian Reformed Church Calls accepted: — Lindsay, Ont., Rev. Ronald V. Luchies, Lucknow, Ont. Calls extended: — First, Guelph, Ont., Rev. Jake Kuipers, of First, Samia, Ont. — Wallaceburg, Ont., Rev. Richard T. Vander Vaart of Bethel, Saskatoon, Sask.	BARRIE, Ont.: Timothy Christian School is seeking a French teacher for a maternity leave position from January to June of 1998. Responsibilities include French instruction for grades 3 through 8 with a 30% contract. Please direct resumes to: Mrs. Jane Tjeerdema Timothy Christian School 49 Ferris Lane Barrie, ON L4M 2Y1	Miscellaneous  Attention: All churches Please inform us of important changes. Items under "Church News" will be included free of charge.

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Miscellaneous

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Job Opportunities

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Mr. J. Vanderkooy, Principal
Hamilton District Chr. High School
92 Glancaster Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 3K9
Fax: (905) 648-3139

Job Opportunities

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- Full-time special needs caregiver/teacher aide for Grade 3 student for January to June.

Employment beyond these terms is a possibility since we anticipate openings for the following school year.

Please direct complete applications to:
Leo Smit, Superintendent

Langley Christian Middle and High School
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The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), is seeking applicants for the full-time position of **Finance/Personnel Assistant** in the Burlington office of the Christian Reformed Church. The position responsibilities include administrative processes in the areas of payroll, benefits, human resources, and general finance. Qualified candidates should possess relevant educational and work experience and demonstrate computer skills in both word and data processing software environments. Interpersonal, written, and oral communication skills are essential as is the ability to function well within a team environment.

For consideration, please submit a copy of your resume stating your interest, by **October 22, 1997**.

Director of Personnel
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Phone: (905) 336-2920; Fax: (905) 336-8344
E-mail: veldboot@crcna.org


Seeking a Youth Pastor

West End Chr. Ref. Church, Edmonton, Alta., is seeking a dynamic and enthusiastic **full-time youth pastor** to fill an existing, vacated position. West End, a large CRC in Western Canada, has a relatively new modern worship and education facility, and a large youth population.

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Our church profile and position description is available. Contact in confidence:

Rick Struik, Search Committee Chair,
180 Waygood Road, Edmonton, AB T5T 5M4,
tel. (403) 481-3016 (hm), or (403) 489-8080 (wk).
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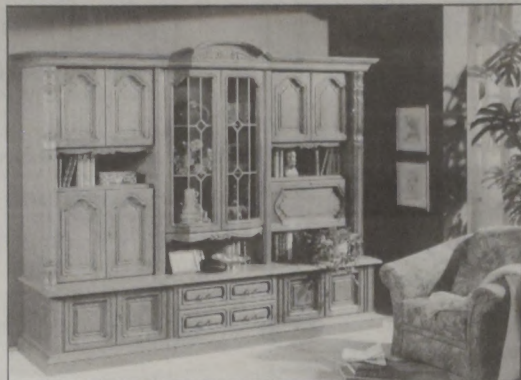
Please send applications to:
John Kalverda, Executive Director
Holland Christian Homes Inc.
7900 McLaughlin Road South
Brampton, ON L6Y 5A7
Fax: (905) 459-8667

An Anniversary coming up?
Please note...

If you would like to place an anniversary announcement please note the dates that *Christian Courier* does not publish a paper (**see page 5, publication box**). Please keep in mind the date of the anniversary and the open house, if there is one. **Ten days before the issue date** all copy should be in. This will avoid the disappointment of people being informed too late about an anniversary date or open house of dear friends.

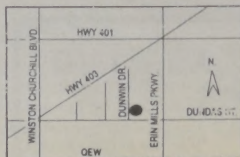
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Events

Frisian Worship Service

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 in the Chr. Ref. Church, Mt. Brydges, Ont.,
 led by Pastor John D. Hellinga.
Info.: (519) 264-2362

40th Anniversary

Christian Reformed Church, Burnaby, B.C.

Members and friends of Burnaby Chr. Ref. Church will celebrate 40 years of God's blessings. A special service of thanksgiving and praise will be held on Sunday, November 16, 1997, at 10:30 a.m. The Saturday evening before, November 15, we will have a coffee and dessert social of entertainment and fellowship. All former members and friends are invited to join us in our celebration.

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Miscellaneous

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Events

Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

- Oct. 18 Annual general meeting at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. Schedule: 12 noon: luncheon/student choir/speaker (Mike Goheen); 1:30 p.m.: registration; 2 p.m.: annual meeting. Info.: (905) 648-2131 (#)
- Oct. 18 Annual day of encouragement and training for deacons, elders and other caregivers, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., at HDCHS, Ancaster, Ont. Theme: "Helping to bring hope!" Featuring 19 workshops and 19 seminars. Cost \$40. Contact your deacons for a registration form, or call Diaconal Ministries at (905) 646-4511 (#)
- Oct. 18 The Netherlands Bazaar, 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Thornhill Community Centre (Bayview Ave. & John St.), Thornhill, Ont. Info.: (905) 477-1243 (#)
- Oct. 18 Concert by the WLU Symphony, featuring organist Jonathan Oldengarm, 7:30 p.m., Benton St. Baptist Church, Kitchener, Ont.
- Oct. 24 Internationally-known organ virtuoso Carlo Curley will give a concert at 8 p.m., Knox Presb. Church, 147 Simcoe St. N., Oshawa, Ont. Info./tickets: (905) 885-6184 or 728-8673.
- Oct. 25 Concert by the choir of Clarkson CRC and the Con Spirito Choir (Wyoming), 7:30 p.m., Clarkson CRC, 1880 Lakeshore Rd. W., Mississauga, Ont. Tickets/Info.: (905) 823-7262.
- Oct. 25 Arts & Crafts Festival, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Jubilee Fellowship CRC, 13 Wilholme Dr., St. Catharines, Ont. Info.: (905) 687-3372 (#)
- Oct. 25 Giant Bazaar, Trinity Chr. School, 650 Walkers Line (south of Fairview), Burlington, Ont., from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., followed by an auction starting at 6:30 p.m. (#)
- Oct. 25 The Lighthouse International Feast, featuring an Indonesian rice table and silent auction, 6 p.m., Willowdale Chr. School, Willowdale, Ont. Info./tickets: (416) 535-6262.
- Oct. 25 "Get a Job!", a CLAC-sponsored, one-day workshop on youth employment for high school and university seniors, their counsellors, teachers and parents. From 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Best Western Sunset Inn (Dixie & Shawson), Mississauga, Ont. Info.: 1-800-268-5281 (#)
- Oct. 25 Christian Rainbows Fellowship meets at 10 a.m., in Ingersoll, Ont. Speakers: Lesley Bell and Denise Jennings, both from the St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital, and Rev. John De Vries. Pre-registration of \$7 required. Info.: (905) 639-1075 or (519) 246-9993.
- Oct. 25 Community concert by organist Jonathan Oldengarm, 7:30 p.m., Benton St. Baptist Church, Kitchener, Ont.
- Oct. 27-31 Speaking tour of Dr. John P. Roberts of the John Calvin Seminary (Mexico City) in Western Canada. Oct. 27: Winnipeg, Man.; Oct. 28: Edmonton, Alta.; Oct. 29: Calgary, Alta.; Oct. 30: Lethbridge, Alta.; Oct. 31: Vancouver, B.C. Watch for local announcements!
- Oct. 31 Senior Citizens' Day, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. Info./registration: (905) 648-2131 (#)
- Nov. 7 Christian Festival Concert by the 100-voice choir and concert band of the Ont. Chr. Music Assembly, with special guests from Europe, under the direction of Leendert Kooij. At 8 p.m., Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto, Ont. For tickets/info. call (416) 636-9779 (#).
- Nov. 9 Dutch worship service led by Rev. R. Praamsma, 3 p.m., CRC, Ancaster, Ont.
- Nov. 22 "Finding the Light" conference on abuse, from 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., East CRC, Strathroy, Ont. Keynote speaker: Beth Swagman. Info.: (519) 245-0253 or 245-0139.

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Christian Labour Association of Canada
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News

Stephen Ministry expands care-giving beyond pastors



PHOTO: BERT WITVOET

Carolyn Horton offered a lively presentation

Bert Witvoet

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. — More than 200 people from some 40 churches of different denominations gathered in Covenant Christian Reformed Church on Saturday, Sept. 27, to learn more about a care ministry for lay persons called the Stephen Ministries.

Covenant is one of three Christian Reformed Churches in Canada that has implemented this care ministry; the other two are Zion CRC in Oshawa and New Life CRC in Pickering, all three in Ontario.

To introduce the Stephen Ministry into a local church, a congregation has to enrol in the Stephen Series, an extensive program begun in 1975 by Kenneth C. Haugk, a pastor and clinical psychologist at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri. At the moment over 5,000 congregations from over 75 denominations in 19 countries use the Stephen Series.

The Stephen Series is promoted by organizers as "a complete system of training and organizing lay persons for caring ministry in and around their congregations." People who are trained through this series are called Stephen ministers.

One-to-one compassion

To date, Covenant CRC has two trained leaders: Pauline Drenth and Ingrid Torn, who in turn are training 10 other Stephen ministers. The idea is that the Stephen ministers pick up the congregation's caring ministry where pastors and elders leave off because of other duties. The basic resource used by Stephen leaders include over 2,200 pages of teaching and administrative materials in an organized folder system.

This lay ministry is a one-on-one service in which a Stephen minister commits him- or herself to at least a weekly visit with a person in crisis for as long as is necessary.

A Stephen Series workshop booklet identifies people in crisis as: "People who are hospitalized, individuals who are terminally ill and their families, persons who are separated or in the process of divorce, those having an unwanted pregnancy, people who are bereaved, people who have lost their jobs, single parents, people who are lonely, people recently retired, and many more."

Grieving is a gift

The Stephen Ministry presenter at Covenant CRC, Carolyn Horton from St. Petersburg, Fla., told participants that by the end of the workshop they would know what to say and what not to say when visiting a grieving person.

"Grieving is a gift that God has given us" when adversity strikes, Horton said. "It allows us to express what is bothering us." Her main point was not to try to answer the grieving person's questions or to solve his or her problems, but to reflect and affirm what the grieving person is expressing.

There are various stages to the grieving process, Horton added. It starts with disbelief or denial, especially when the loss is sudden. The next stage is awareness of the reality of the loss. This stage can express itself in anger or hostility, in guilt feelings or in other strong feelings of loss. The final stage is recovery, which "completes" the grieving process, although a sense of loss never quite disappears. There is no specific length to this process and the grieving person can

fluctuate between stages, said Horton.

Spiritual source of healing

She cautioned potential Stephen ministers against trying to replace professionals such as pastors and therapists. But an article by Susan Cunningham published in the workshop booklet validates the ministry by saying that therapists often neglect the spiritual side of persons in crisis.

The booklet quotes Edward Shafranske, professor of religion at the University of San Diego, as saying that psychology tried "to earn its credentials and respectability as an empirical science as opposed to a speculative discipline [by removing] the dimension of spirituality ... outside of the legitimate purview of psychology."

Stephen ministers can put the spiritual back into the emotional healing process, organizers believe.

Not cheap

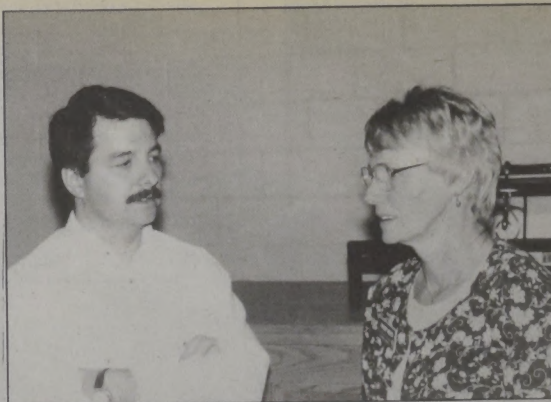
Horton warned the workshop participants that enrolling a congregation in the series is not

year are alternatively offered in six U.S. locations: Orlando, Fla.; San Antonio, Tex.; St. Louis, Mo.; San Diego, Calif.; Seattle, Wash.; and Baltimore, Md. The total cost for adopting and implementing the Stephen Series and training two or three local leaders, which is all a church would need, comes to between \$5,000 and \$6,500 (Can.).

Worthwhile investment

Clarkson CRC pastor Gordon Pols, who attended the workshop with five other members, did not think the cost to be exorbitant, considering how well organized the program is and how valuable an improved pastoral ministry can be.

Comparing a one-time expense of \$6,500 to the hiring of a full-time pastoral care-giver places the cost in a reasonable light, said Horton. A booklet testimony from Amy Snow of Fridley, Minn., puts it this way: "Pastoral needs are so numerous that one pastor cannot meet them all. Therefore, we feel called to multiply the 'caring hands' of our congregation through appropriately



Covenant leaders: Rev. Eric Groot-Nibbelink and Pauline Drenth (Ingrid Torn was away in the Netherlands).

cheap. Congregations pay a one-time fee of \$1,675 (US). This entitles them to enrol as many members as they wish in leader's training courses for the cost of the conference fees.

But the seven-day conference fees for 1998 are steep, too. Covering six nights of lodging, a number of group meals and all workshops, they are \$697 (US) per person. And a leader's manual costs \$139 (US). To this must be added the cost of transportation, which for Canadian participants usually implies airline tickets, since the leader's training courses each

trained lay people. We can't afford another pastor, yet at the same time, we can't afford to let this one drop over from overwork!"

A caring church

Three members of St. George's Anglican Church in St. Catharines, whose parish has been in the Stephen Ministry since 1990 testified that the world is getting out about their church being a caring church. Having trained 22 Stephen ministers for their church they enthusiastically recommended the program to all participants.

News Digest

Toy run welcomes Hell's Angels

EDMONTON (CP) — As long as the emphasis is on "Angels," the Hell's Angels will be welcome at this year's Santa's Anonymous Motorcycle Toy Run in Edmonton. "As long as they bring a toy, that's the only requirement," says Jan Steenson, organizer of the October charity event.

Up to 3,000 motorcycle fans turn out yearly for the toy run that collects Christmas gifts for needy children. Steenson says Hell's Angels have participated before and there may be more this year since the biker gang moved into Edmonton this summer.

But city police spokesperson Annette Bidniak says the public shouldn't be fooled by the image of burly bikers bearing teddy bears. "We just hope that people see beyond that facade, because that's exactly what it is," she says.

Soccer or church?

MILWAUKEE, Wis. (EP) — Families shouldn't have to choose between soccer and church, say clergy in Milwaukee. A group of 22 ministers have signed a letter asking coaches and youth organizations to stop scheduling games on Sunday mornings. "It used to be that people had respect for Sunday morning," complained Rev. John Sumwalt, pastor of Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church.

But Mark Botterill, whose Milwaukee Kickers Soccer Club has about 11,000 young people involved, said he receives few complaints from parents, and notes that Jewish families would prefer not to play on Saturdays. Concerned churches may need to round up support "at home" first — a parochial league recently began playing Sunday morning games on fields near the archbishop's office.

Homeless stay in City Hall

TORONTO — Toronto's homeless population will be able to go to Metro City Hall to get out of the cold this winter, reports the *Globe and Mail*. The city council passed a proposal to open the downtown building every night this winter to the homeless. This is believed to be the first time in Canada that government buildings will be used as temporary shelters.